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CHILDREN OF EVE

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE

L.C.

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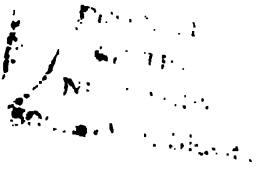

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CHILDREN OF EVE

CHAPTER I

EVERY ONE who has visited Florence must know at least by sight the old Ubinaldi palace, with its fortress-like walls of superb masonry, deep brown from the combined effects of age and exposure to wind and weather, and its fine battlemented tôp, that catches the first gleam from the rising sun and glints with gold as if in reply to that caress. The lower windows, fiercely protected by iron cross-bars, seem to watch furtively the ebb and flow of human life that passes along that busy thoroughfare of modern Florence. The south side of the palace faces the Arno with its ancient and picturesque bridges, and commands a view of the towers and domes that are so delicately painted against a background of green hills and blue sky on the opposite shore of Oltr' Arno. But the splendor of its interior during the past twenty-five years has been known only to the privileged few, for the old Prince Ubinaldi, who was eighty years old at the time this story may be said to begin, had become in the passing of time a confirmed recluse, admitting few to his domain and none to his friendship. His wife had long been dead; his only child, a son, had died about eighteen years before, leaving a widow and a little daughter. They were the prince's only surviving near relations and they lived with him in the old palace near the Arno.

His daughter-in-law, the Marchesa San Raimondo, was an Englishwoman, and for that reason the old prince had violently opposed his son's marriage, for he had formed other plans for him and was enraged to see them upset. He had lived,

however, to be thankful for the courageous obstinacy Andrea had displayed in that important crisis of his life, and to recognize the wisdom of his choice. He was devoted to Helen, who had given herself wholly to her husband's country, as is often the way with Englishwomen who have made happy marriages with foreigners. She had become Italianate, and the Prince considered that her low-pitched English voice gave an additional music to the beautiful language which had now become as her own. She and Andrea had adored each other; for both it had been a real love-match, the mating, too, of North and South, which can be so wonderful or so disastrous a thing.

Helen was now a little more than forty years old and her daughter was twenty. Caterina or—as she was always called—Rina, had inherited much that was British from her mother, and a little that was very purely Italian from her father, whom she did not remember at all. She had quantities of corn-colored hair, and she was tall with the slim and agile figure of a boy, although she had never played any active games in her life. But her eyes were dark and long-shaped and she had the pale, creamy white skin of the Italian. She had something of the physical energy that belongs to the North, something as well of its reserve and control. There were depths of obstinacy in the girl of which her mother was perfectly aware but which she had never as yet had occasion to sound. It lay there like some obscure concealed danger that might suddenly manifest itself in the swift, unexpected, but powerful way of repressed qualities. The Marchesa used to hope that no occasion would arise to tempt the sudden use of Rina's self-will. She dreaded a clash of wills, not between herself and her daughter but between Rina and the old prince.

It is all very well to be a recluse at eighty, and even at forty there are days when no exterior attraction can compete with the desirable tranquillity of one's own four walls, but at twenty such a condition of life is not commonly accepted without rebellion. Rina had not as yet begun to rebel, but she had displayed from time to time symptoms of restiveness. And Helen tried as far as possible to restrain her daughter and to keep these very natural manifestations from the knowledge of the old prince.

He treated his granddaughter still as if she were a child, was affectionate and caressing as one is to a child, yet he would also speak sharply to her and rebuke her, just as he had done when she was a very little girl indeed. Rina never resented it; she was sweet-tempered and accustomed to the despotic rule of her grandfather, and certainly never dreamed of defying it. She had pretty and graceful ways that pleased him, and she had the low-pitched voice that he loved in her mother, the clear utterance that reached without difficulty across his increasing deafness.

Rina had few friends of her own age, but she had lately formed a friendship with a woman much older than herself, a certain Contessa Binaldi who lived with her brother, Conte Antonio Delfini, in Florence. Helen wondered sometimes if Maria Binaldi had pointed out to Rina that her life was dull and different from that of most girls of her own age. She was not quite sure that the friendship was a very wise one, but there were traditional ties between the two families, and the old prince had approved of it, and liked to hear that Rina had lunched or been out for a drive with her friend.

Up till now Rina had never been to England, although she knew some of her English cousins who had sometimes spent the winter months in Florence.

Her aunt, Lady Ellington, who was Helen's only sister, was a widow with two children, a son and a daughter. When they were younger she had often brought them to Florence, but since they had grown up and Peregrine the son had succeeded to his father's title and property there had been difficulties in the way. Her son did not care for traveling and was never happy away from Queen's Barn, the old manor house in Hampshire that was his home. Lady Ellington, therefore, remained with her children, and it was now some years since she had seen her sister and niece. She felt, however, that it was high time Rina should visit England, and one day toward the end of February she wrote a letter to Helen and invited the girl to come and pay them a long visit. If she came in April she could stay with them for a month at Queen's Barn first, and then could go to London with them for a few weeks. It was a tempting offer, and Helen had often wished that her daughter might have some break of the kind. The only difficulty lay in the opposition which the old prince was bound to display were such a plan broached to him.

Some years before, Lady Ellington had suggested that Rina should go to England and accompany her own daughter Molly to a convent school in one of the southern counties. Helen had been very much in favor of the proposed plan, for she felt that Rina was in need of the companionship of girls of her own age. But her father-in-law opposed it so violently that she was compelled to yield, and since then there had been no question of the girl's leaving Italy.

Helen read her sister's letter many times, but she said nothing about its contents to Rina, and for two days she did not even approach her father-in-law on the subject. But she felt very strongly that the experience of going to England would prove a

wholesome as well as a pleasant one for Rina. She was too self-centered; she needed companionship; she was inclined to be silent and reserved. Her upbringing was to blame for much of this, for the atmosphere of the old palace was decidedly repressing. But deeper than any of these reasons the Marchesa was aware that she had a very definite wish that Rina should see something of England, should experience something of its life, so different from the life of Italy. She felt that the experience would not only benefit her but would develop those traits that were very clearly and agreeably English in her daughter's character. And she knew, too, that she would feel a certain pride in sending her child to live for a time among these English relations. She felt quite sure that she would do her great credit, and that her beauty, which was becoming more radiant and pronounced every day, would be certain to attract attention and admiration. And she could not help desiring that Rina should have this glimpse of the world before her marriage. No marriage had as yet been arranged for her and Helen was secretly thankful for the respite, but she knew that when the old prince came to remember that his granddaughter was twenty years old the event could not be long delayed. As yet he had made no allusion to it, but that he would have a very important voice in the matter Helen did not doubt. Perhaps it would be upon this very point that Rina would display something of that latent obstinacy, and if so there would be a terrific clash of wills in the old palace. And perhaps it was for this reason more than any other that Helen desired so greatly that Rina should taste a little of that wholesome English freedom she had herself known as a girl.

She took the letter in her hand and went down the wide flight of marble stairs to her father-in-law's

private apartments. She felt a strange, repressed excitement, almost as if she were going to ask a favor not for Rina but for herself.

It was not quite dusk, though the February day was quickly closing in. The houses on the opposite side of the river were still pale and luminous; their irregularity and confused outlines lent them a charming picturesqueness. The river was like a broad path of flowing, colorless, but radiant light. She paused for a moment beside an open window and looked out, as she loved to do, upon the river and the ancient bridges that were visible from the palace. There was a breeze, cool but not cold; it touched her forehead with a buoyant, fragrant quality; it seemed to give her courage. She was nervous and apprehensive about the approaching interview with Prince Ubinaldi. But the more she thought of it the more urgent it appeared to her that Rina should have this experience. Helen had set her heart upon it, and not the least of her motives was the very natural maternal pride she felt in this beautiful young daughter of hers.

She turned the handle of the tall painted door and walked through the first of the magnificent suite of rooms that from time immemorial had been dedicated to the occupancy of the reigning lord of the house. There is something grave and austerely beautiful and dignified about an Italian house that has been suffered to remain untouched. Tall pillars of pale marble supported the ceiling, which was decorated with graceful nymphs offering baskets of fruit and garlands of flowers to arrogant and disdainful-looking peacocks. Wreaths of roses made delicate frames to the classical landscape depicted thereon in soft and faded tints. The walls were hung with fine old tapestries, and high, straight-backed chairs heavily carven, with seats and backs

of ancient crimson damask, stood rigidly against them. Helen passed through this room and through another scarcely less large and formal before she reached the comparatively small *salotto* where the old prince was sitting before a great wood fire.

He looked round and smiled as she came in. Although he was eighty and growing both frail and deaf he was still a personage, a despot; not one who could be disregarded in any way. He was thin and tall and very upright, with thick white hair and great, flashing coal-black eyes. They were the eyes of a passionate man whose temper might easily be aroused, but they held a very kindly, softened expression as they rested now upon the Marchesa San Raimondo. Those dark gray eyes of hers with their tranquil and serene expression, the soft and thick brown hair with no touch of gray in it, the clear, pale complexion, were unaltered almost from the day when Andrea had brought his young wife to Florence twenty-one years ago. Rina, with her crown of corn-colored hair, her flashing dark eyes that were the eyes of Andrea, her slight, delicately modeled features, was in his opinion far less lovely than her mother. The girl was alert, energetic, full of life, but he preferred the grave passivity of Helen. She never betrayed anything of the nervous restlessness of modern women. She would come and sit with him for a long time, scarcely speaking, but often reading and working, and he liked to know that she was there, occupied, contented and very still.

"How is your cold this afternoon?" she said, standing beside his chair.

"It is almost gone. I should have driven out for an hour—the sun was really warm and it would have been delicious in the Cascine—if it had not been for Masetti. I sometimes think he comes here on

purpose to tell me not to go out. He said it would be a risk—that there was a touch of tramontana. As if I cared for tramontana. I have lived through eighty springs of it!"

"I am glad you did not run the risk," she said quietly.

"Where's the child? I haven't seen her since breakfast. It struck me she was looking a little pale. Do you think Masetti ought to see her? Andrea used to have that look sometimes."

He sighed. His only son had been delicate physically even as a young man, and he had had no strength to resist the sudden attack of pneumonia to which he had succumbed the third winter after his marriage, when Rina was barely two years old.

"I think Rina is quite well. She never has much color, you know."

The Marchesa paused and her clear, gray eyes rested upon the old man. "It is about Rina that I wish to speak to you," she said.

"About Rina? What's she been doing? Not worrying you, I hope? Send her to me if she has!" He gathered his thick black brows in a frown.

"Rina never worries me—you know that quite well. She is the sweetest girl in the world. I sometimes tell myself that I'm spoiled. I've so little to worry me—to bewilder me."

He liked to hear her say that; his brows were quickly unbent.

"Well, what did you want to say about her, then, Helen?"

"My sister, Theresa Ellington, has written to me. She is very anxious that Rina should go to England and stay with her for a time. She thinks the cousins ought to know each other better."

There was a little tremor in her voice, and her heart beat rather more quickly than usual as she

pronounced the words, and watched the gathering signs of disapproval in the old man's face. Then she asked gently:

"What would you think of such a plan, dear?"

"I should think exactly what you do. That it's the stupidest suggestion I've heard for a long time. Rina doesn't need to go to England. When we plan anything for her it must be her marriage."

"And if I were to tell you that I don't think it stupid? That I want her to go? That I think it would be very good for her in more ways than one? She has seen nothing of the world."

"How could it possibly do Rina good to go to England? It is a most horrible climate. And I don't choose that she should leave Italy. She is a Florentine—she must remember that. I don't want her to have her head stuffed with crazy English notions."

The Marchesa San Raimondo was silent. She had expected a certain amount of cold water to be poured upon the proposal, but she perceived from long experience that her father-in-law intended to do more than throw cold water. His voice was harsh and aggressive, as it sometimes was when he was determined to have his own way in the face of opposition.

And he had always had his own way ever since he came to man's estate. For sixty years his word had been law in the old palace. He was a hard, determined man to whom every one gave way. Helen had very quickly learned to submit her will to his; in a sense it had been an easy thing to do, productive of its due reward of smoothness and harmony in their mutual relations. She loved him very dearly because he was Andrea's father, and when her husband died it seemed the most natural thing that he should order and arrange everything for her

just as he had done in Andrea's lifetime. And she had permitted him to arrange everything also for Rina. The child had hardly known her own father, and her grandfather's authority had been paramount in her young life for as long as she could remember. Helen had brought her up to a tacit recognition of this state of things. Rina had to obey the old prince as she would have had to obey Andrea if he had lived. There was never any question about it; it was always taken for granted. But sometimes of late Helen had perceived in Rina a tendency to be restless when the autocratic rule pressed rather heavily; she seemed to detect the signs of a young soul striving to free itself. She could not be blind to them. It was the English part of Rina that was making itself felt and crying out for its independence, for its individual rghts. And that was why Helen wished so ardently that the girl might go away for a little time.

"Helen, I won't have it! Do you hear? You must tell your sister it's impossible. If she wants the children to know each other she must bring hers here. Rina shall not leave Florence."

Helen stretched out her hand and touched the old man's.

"And if I tell you that I want it for Rina? I have not often asked you twice for something you did not wish to give."

It was quite true. Her voice was still proud and steady. She went on:

"You mustn't forget that Rina is my daughter—she is half English. I want her to see and know my country."

He gazed at her in astonishment.

"Why, you have only been there once these twenty years—that was when your father died. I thought—I hoped—you had forgotten it!"

"I have never forgotten it. But my life—my interests—have all lain here. I am not asking to go away myself. I—I prefer to remain. But I want Rina to go—for a few months—before there is any necessity to think about her marriage."

The old prince frowned, and his thin, gaunt face assumed obstinate lines. One saw in him then the stubborn, almost tyrannical autocrat who had ruled three generations and was little accustomed to being thwarted. He could never remember that Helen had shown such persistence before. She had been young when she first came to Florence, a slim slip of a girl who had readily enough accustomed herself to a new outlook and new ways, in a foreign country. She had never been spoiled in her girlhood; she had known the steady discipline of a strict, rather old-fashioned Catholic home. There had never been any suggestion of modern independence about her. Why had she, therefore, so unexpectedly adopted this determined attitude in regard to the proposed journey to England?

"Rina has been talking to you—Rina has been persuading you!" he exclaimed with sudden violence. "We shall have no peace if we begin to let her have her own way."

"I have not mentioned the subject to Rina—she knows nothing of my sister's invitation. You must do me the justice to believe that I consulted you first," said Helen with a touch of warmth.

"I beg your pardon, Helen," he said with a swift gesture of apology. "I might have known that. But what has come over you?"

Now the Marchesa had reached a point at which she might reasonably have yielded. She did not like struggling and it made her feel almost as degraded as if she had been engaged in a physical conflict. To destroy existing harmony always wounded

her and made her feel ill at ease, almost as if she were doing wrong. But her love for her daughter sustained her. She had watched anxiously those symptoms of restlessness that Rina had displayed during the past few months. She sometimes thought that they were more marked on the days when she had spent most of her free time in the company of Maria Binaldi. It was perhaps only natural that Rina, being young, should wish for a life of more amusement, more gaiety. Helen could not bring herself to sacrifice Rina's youth as in a sense her own had been sacrificed. Not that she regretted her own life for a moment. She had accepted it when she married her husband. She had been ignorant perhaps of what it would hereafter involve of exile and self-denial when that beloved presence which had made life so beautiful a thing to her had been removed. She had been ready indeed to make every imaginable sacrifice for her husband, as is the way of a woman very deeply in love, but it had been less easy to do so for his father. Yet she had accomplished the task. Rina was, however, very young; she had the rights of youth.

"I do want you to let me have my own way with Rina just this once," she went on quietly. "It is hard for me to ask for anything—do not please make it harder. We must not quarrel."

"Do you mean you intend to go against me?" he demanded, astonished at her words.

"No—I would rather persuade you that I am right in wishing her to go."

"You do not realize the danger of letting her go to England alone without you. She would be falling in love with some absurd person whom it would be impossible for her to marry. You know the liberty that young people have in England, and I

entirely disapproved of the way your sister let her children run about in Florence that last winter they were here. No, Helen; I'm very sorry to disappoint you, but I can't have it. I refuse my consent. Let's hear no more of it."

He leaned back in his chair as if exhausted by the discussion; then he picked up the *Corriere della sera* and began to glance at its contents as if in tacit dismissal of herself and the subject. But Helen sat there as if she did not at all intend to be dismissed, in spite of the rebuff she had received. Suddenly he looked at her with stormy eyes over the top of the newspaper.

"Rina is a Florentine. Let her remain a Florentine! When she is married she can go and stay in England as much as she likes if she can get her husband to take her there. She is twenty, is she not? It's high time she was married. People are saying that Maria Binaldi is making a friend of her to pave the way for Antonio Delfini. For my part I should wish for nothing better."

"Rina will never marry Delfini," said Helen.

"She will certainly marry him if I tell her to do so," said the old autocrat. "He is a very rich man and the child has a taste for luxury."

"He is almost old enough to be her father," said Helen indignantly.

"So much the better. I don't care for these gay, modern young men wanting to go into business and flying off to America to make money or pick up a rich wife. Who ever heard of that in my day, I should like to know?"

It seemed as if they had now traveled a long way from the consideration of Rina's immediate future. But he twisted the two ends of the conversation together with a surprising skill.

"If you persist in this scheme you'll force me to

send for Delfini. I'll announce the betrothal!" he stormed.

Helen's fair face was flushed with an unusual anger. Far back in the dim recesses of her mind she was conscious now that this fear had often lurked, but she had been too much of a coward to envisage it squarely. But it had given a very real strength to her reasons for wishing Rina to go to England. If the girl went away for a year it was possible that Delfini might seek and find another wife. She was quite sure that Rina could never care for him, and she did not wish her to make a suitable marriage that was also loveless on her side.

"Mind, Helen, I'm not joking! I mean what I say! I'll have no nonsense! You shan't fiddle with the child's future!"

He jerked out the angry, peremptory sentences like a succession of abrupt pistol shots.

Helen drew herself up and looked at him strangely.

"Rina is my child. You seem to have forgotten that," she said. Then without a word she went out of the room, leaving him sitting there speechless with astonishment.

But like all women accustomed to give obedience and submission, this little victory cost her dear. She found that she was trembling from head to foot; she felt ill and shaken. She went up to her room and lay down upon her bed with its wonderful old curtains of faded crimson damask.

CHAPTER II

IT was Maria Binaldi who precipitated the crisis, and she performed that feat just when the cloud of dissension had for the first time threatened to

darken the harmony that had hitherto existed between the old prince and his daughter-in-law; namely, the very evening of the scene between those two people.

Rina had been driving with her that afternoon, and they returned to the palace just after Helen had gone up to her room. Rina went in search of her mother and found that she was lying down with a bad headache. In the little interval before the girl returned to her grandfather's apartments Maria was able to snatch the opportunity of approaching him for the first time on her brother's behalf.

The Contessa Binaldi dei Delfini—to give her full title—was Antonio's only sister, and she was his senior by two years. She had always dominated him, for her personality was strong and overbearing, while his was indolent and amiable. The years that divided their ages had only strengthened this ascendency which had indeed begun to assert itself first in their nursery days. She was a very clever woman and he was not at all a clever man, but their devotion to each other was close and deep. It had known only one break, which had lasted for about four years—a melancholy period for Toni and one that had not proved a happy one for his sister. Those four years covered the period of her married life which she had spent almost altogether in Palermo, for her husband had been a Sicilian. It was not an experience to which Maria often alluded, and when she did so it was with an acid bitterness that suggested that the venture had not been successful. Perhaps she had made the initial mistake of believing that she could rule another man just as easily and simply as she had always ruled Toni, and had found to her cost that this was not the case. When she was left a widow she returned to the old palace in Florence and was glad to think that her

brother had not married during her absence. Twelve years had gone by since then, and of late she had begun to think that it would be well for Toni to marry. He was thirty-five years old, and he was one of the richest of Florentine bachelors. He managed his affairs with a careful prudence and in this he displayed a capable and practical intelligence. He was very charitable and gave away large sums to the Church and to the poor. Maria did not intend to lay down her scepter altogether on behalf of her brother's wife; on the contrary, she was quite determined to keep everything under her kindly if firm sway, not excepting the young couple themselves. She was a handsome woman and a little unscrupulous, as are almost all intriguing women who love power.

"Have you never thought of marrying, Toni?" she inquired one day.

Conte Delfini started from a dreamlike reverie. He was a handsome man, looking more than his years by reason, perhaps, of a curious, unchanging sedateness. He was dark, with smooth dark hair and dark brown eyes. He wore also a small dark beard that perhaps added to his age.

"I have sometimes thought of it," he replied, "but I thought, too, that you might not like the idea. It would make a difference to you. Besides, we are very happy as we are."

Now Maria, as we have seen, had already resolved that her brother's marriage should make little or no difference to her. It would give her two people to manage instead of one, but that was a detail. Had she been an entirely selfish woman she would not perhaps have urged him to marry, but her love for him was the one real honest and stable emotion of her life, and she could be unselfish—up to a certain point—where Toni was concerned.

"Oh, you must not think of me, you know," she said lightly.

"Do you really want me to marry?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I do. You are at an age when most men marry. You have never thought of any one?"

Toni reddened a little.

"There is only one person in Florence I should wish to marry," he admitted with a touch of nervousness.

This confession had astonished Maria very much indeed. She had never dimly suspected that the unknown had taken shape. She felt almost as nervous as Toni, and dreaded to think what name might now be reluctantly submitted for her consideration as that of her future rival in his affections.

"My dear Toni, who on earth's that?" she asked.

"Andrea Ubinaldi's daughter," said Antonio.

"But, my dear Toni, she's a mere child!"

"She must be very nearly twenty. And she doesn't look like a child. I have seen her in church. She is very beautiful. Sometimes I have said a few words to her when I have called on her grandfather."

"The Ubinaldi would be enchanted, of course," said Maria with a touch of acerbity.

"Oh, surely not," he answered quickly. "You see, she's an only child, and of course they must think all the world of her. And I—I am years older. I fear it would be no use of our even approaching them."

"How perfectly ridiculous you are," she said impatiently, "you seem to forget that you are the best *parti* in Florence—there's hardly a girl that wouldn't give her eyes to be Contessa Delfini. Old Pasquale Ubinaldi will be certain to welcome you with open arms. The girl will have hardly any *dot*, I've always heard."

"I don't wish to be married for my money," said Toni, with a touch of obstinacy. "But if Rina Ubinaldi could care for me I should be very happy."

"I will ask her here," said Maria, "you must leave this to me. I'll do what I can for you, Toni."

"Then you approve?"

"Of course I approve. Rina is charming."

Delfini beamed. Now he had won his sister's approbation—he did not call it consent—he felt certain that all would go smoothly. She put fresh heart into him, as the saying goes; she made light of all those obstacles which his love had exaggerated into insurmountable barriers. She made him feel quite sure of success; she spurred him on into a good conceit of himself. He was more than ever convinced that Maria was a very wonderful woman. She would arrange all the preliminaries and she was quite ready to tackle the old prince himself. She seemed to have no fear of this man, whom a hundred legends had endowed with fierce, tyrannical, almost cruel, attributes. That he could ever be welcomed by him as a potential grandson-in-law had never occurred to poor diffident Toni.

That conversation had taken place in the autumn, and during the busy winter months that followed Maria had gone to work in her own way. Although there was a traditional friendship between the two Florentine houses based upon an intermarriage in the dim past, Maria did not know Helen very well. But she set to work to interest her in some of her pet charities, and once or twice Rina had accompanied her mother to the splendid Delfini palace. Maria's attention had flattered Rina, as young girls are apt to be flattered by the evident liking of an older woman. She was introduced to a very different atmosphere from the one that prevailed at her own home. Maria was a great reader and she had

many absorbing interests. Her tastes were artistic and she possessed a good deal of personal magnetism that was not without its effect upon Rina. Maria had been determined to win the girl's affection and the task had proved almost childishly easy. Rina's devotion was quickly aroused; she was enchanted with her new friend. She was at an age when people are keenly susceptible to new influences. Maria made her do her hair differently; she helped her to choose clothes that were at once effective and fashionable. This had now gone on for some months, and it had brought color and purpose into Rina's life. She had sometimes been a little astonished that she should be thus tacitly permitted to enjoy this absorbing friendship, for Maria was utterly unlike her mother's few friends, who were for the most part pious and quiet women engaged in practical works of charity, quite apart from the eternal schemes of *beneficenza* which brought the gay world of Florence to the doors of the sumptuous Delfini palace. But no remonstrance had ever come from Helen's lips nor—and this always struck Rina as much more curious—from her grandfather's. She was allowed to enjoy unrestrictedly this new pleasure.

Rina had gone more often of late to see her friend. Sometimes Toni had been there and sometimes not, for Maria judged it better that she should not at this stage see him too often. Rina, however, felt impatient at his presence; she liked to be alone with her friend and resented the intrusion of this rather shy, silent man. And Maria had been far too prudent to give Rina the least glimpse of her hand.

But now she felt that the time had come when the old prince might be usefully approached with a definite offer. Although she thought it might prove a little premature, she had to deal with a new and

disconcerting impatience on the part of Toni. He had been very good, as his sister felt bound to admit. He had been outwardly content with the meager and insufficient glimpses he had had of Rina. But now he was disinclined to wait any longer; he felt a burning desire to know whether the plan would meet with the approval of the old prince. Once or twice he had even hinted at the possibility of approaching the old man on the subject himself. Maria did not want that to happen. It would be an abrogation of power. Toni must not learn that he could manage his own affairs without her assistance. And he would be sure to make a *gaffe*, unduly deprecating his own worth and perhaps producing an impression that the proud old Ubinaldi would be bestowing a great honor upon him by permitting him to marry his impecunious granddaughter. Toni must certainly not be allowed to diminish his own importance in that way. Maria was determined that Prince Ubinaldi should realize that if any one were to be the recipient of unusual honor it would be Rina and not Toni.

Unwittingly her visit was made precisely at the psychological moment as far as Pasquale was concerned, although it was perhaps not the most propitious one for the attainment of her own ends.

Maria Binaldi never put her hand to the plow without an accurate and prudent calculation as to the length, depth, and eventual goal of the contemplated furrow. But having once put her hand to it the successful accomplishment of that furrow became a matter of absolute necessity to her. She would leave nothing undone in pursuit of her aims. To an ambitious and proud nature such as hers there is something terrible, almost tragic, in failure. It will be seen that she was almost a match for Prince Pasquale.

Maria looked very bright and handsome as she entered his sitting-room. Rina ran away immediately to avert Helen and to take off her hat and the heavy fur coat she was wearing.

The old prince rose and welcomed his visitor warmly. He was still feeling perturbed after that interview with Helen, and he was relieved to feel that some one from outside would be present at tea. Maria was wearing costly Russian furs that did not, however, conceal the whiteness of her throat. She wore a string of very perfect pearls and no other jewelry except two diamond earrings that sparkled as she moved her head. Her hair was black, of that shadowless black one sees in Italy. She had beautiful and expressive dark eyes. She felt quite assured of success, for she knew how to manage men. But she had made one initial mistake—she had not realized the opposition of the quiet, self-effacing Helen. She thought she had only to win old Pasquale's consent and that all would then proceed smoothly to the sound of wedding bells. And perhaps she had also counted a little too much upon Rina's devotion to herself.

When she saw the old man's evident pleasure as he stooped courteously to kiss her hand, she felt that perhaps he was not altogether without suspicion as to the nature of her errand. Florence had talked, and it was by no means improbable that some of its gossip had penetrated the fortress-like walls of the old palace. Florence had certainly been aware that day after day Rina had sat by the side of Contessa Binaldi in her drive in the Cascine or through the beautiful countryside that surrounds the city. And only one construction could be placed upon this friendship between the young girl, who was so little seen in Florence, and the woman who was almost old enough to be her mother. It meant that Toni,

the despair of mothers with marriageable daughters —and also, it must be said, of the daughters themselves—was at last permitting his thoughts to dwell upon the subject of matrimony. Maria Binaldi was not a person who easily made friends with girls, and that she had deliberately sought Rina's friendship was in itself a significant action. Her motives had been perfectly clear to the gossips of Florence long before Rina's eyes were roughly opened.

"I've come to see you with a message from Toni," she began.

"Is your brother not well?" inquired the prince.

"Oh, Toni's never ill. He is always in the most robust health. Indeed, he wanted to come himself, but I wouldn't let him," she went on with disarming frankness, as if she wished to take Pasquale into her confidence. "It's about Toni's marriage that I wish to speak to you."

The old man heaved a sigh of relief. He had been half afraid that she had only come to ask him to let her put his name on some charitable appeal. He was aware that her philanthropic activities were very numerous. He did not know her very well personally, for he had got past the age of knowing any one well. His contemporaries were for the most part dead; he had outlived them all. But the Delfini and the Ubinaldi were, as has been seen, connected in a far-away manner, and in the Middle Ages the families had fought on the same side, espoused the same causes, and the hereditary friendship formed in those old fierce days was suffered to continue. But Pasquale did not altogether approve of Maria; he judged her to be one of those restless, nervous women, highly educated and highly cultivated, rather too modern and liberal in their views, and conspicuously lacking in the quiet domestic virtues he admired in Helen.

"What have you to say to me about Antonio's marriage?" he asked.

His assumption of innocence astonished her and at the same time evoked her wholehearted admiration.

"You have never heard, then, that he admires Rina?" she asked.

"I attach no importance to idle gossip," he replied loftily.

"I have come to-day to plead for Toni," she said, and now she put a deep softness into her voice. "He wants to marry Rina. He asks for your consent, knowing that she is like a daughter to you."

The old prince looked at her with his keen, fierce eyes, and the crow's-feet that formed a network around them seemed to deepen and acquire an even more complicated and intricate pattern.

"Have you ever spoken of this to Rina?" he asked.

"Oh, no; never. Rina is very young. She seems to have no thoughts of marriage. Besides, I particularly wished to know first if you would give your consent."

"Although Rina is, as you say, like my own daughter, she is not my child," he observed thoughtfully, remembering Helen's passionate words.

"You think her mother would not approve?" said Maria.

"I have not said so," he answered haughtily.

To display any eagerness would have been detrimental to his own pride.

"I think it would break my brother's heart if anything prevented this marriage," she affirmed.

"My granddaughter is very young," said the old prince.

"She is twenty," said Contessa Binaldi, "and Toni is thirty-five. He is afraid you may think the differ-

ence too great. For the rest it is the only drawback on his side, and it does not seem to be at all an insurmountable or unusual one."

"I will think it over and I will speak to Rina and her mother," said Pasquale. "One must not decide anything in a hurry." He smiled genially.

He was agreeably surprised to hear that Antonio was aware of obstacles.

"Rina and I are dear friends," continued Maria. "That I think will be in Toni's favor."

"You have been very kind to my granddaughter," said the old prince graciously.

"I love her for her own sake as well as for Toni's."

"Thank you," he said, and his face kindled.

"She is very beautiful—very sweet. My brother will be a most fortunate man if he wins her. And the fact of her being an excellent Catholic——"

"She is a good child," he admitted hastily. "But she has her faults. She needs self-control."

"She will learn that as she grows older," said Maria, who had never learned it.

"We have not spoiled her. I have insisted that she should be brought up with a certain strictness. Left to herself, her mother might have been too soft, as she is her only child. But I have had as much to do with Rina's upbringing as her mother has had. It was necessary. She will make a good wife if Antonio rules her wisely and kindly. She needs a firm hand."

Maria repressed a smile with infinite difficulty.

"I'm afraid Toni isn't much of a martinet," she said. "He'll probably let her do pretty much as she likes! It is the way of these modern young couples, and I do think there's less bickering and squabbling."

"*Eh già!*" he ejaculated, "there is very little au-

thority—very little respect—to be found anywhere nowadays!"

Maria bent forward a little.

"I am so glad to have had this little private talk with you, Prince," she said. "I feel now that I can safely leave dear Toni's fate in your hands."

"I will think it over. Antonio shall hear from me."

"I can rely upon you to plead his cause?"

"You may rely upon me to judge what is best for my grandchild," he answered.

Maria smiled assent.

"I think you had better not mention the matter to Rina yet. Not till I have spoken," he went on.

"I think, too, that would be wiser."

At that moment they were interrupted, for Rina entered the room.

"I'm so sorry, Contessa," she said, "but my mother isn't well. She is lying down with a bad headache and begs you to excuse her."

"Oh, I am very sorry," said Maria, "you must give her my love and say I hope she will soon be better."

The tea was brought in and Rina took her mother's place and began to pour it out into the delicate old china cups. She waited on her grandfather, bringing him the little sugared cakes and sweet biscuits which he preferred, while she and the Contessa ate buttered toast. She talked and laughed quite gaily all through the little meal, and the old prince saw with satisfaction that the two were evidently on very friendly terms. He was glad of that; it would smooth Rina's married path very much if she continued to be on such good terms with Antonio's sister. But what on earth had Helen meant by saying this afternoon that Rina would never marry Delfini? Of course she would

marry him, and the sooner the better! There was no need to delay the wedding for a single day after the Lenten prohibition came to an end. He began to picture Rina as a bride. She would certainly make a very tall and graceful one. Dear, dear, it seemed only the other day that he had journeyed to England to be present at the wedding of his son. And to think the little girl that was born of that marriage was already of an age to be a bride. He looked at Rina quite affectionately. Well, no one could say the girl would be throwing herself away, for she would have the richest husband in Florence —he did not, of course, count foreigners. And Maria Binaldi was actually in favor of it. He had often heard that idle gossip that she would not allow her brother to marry.

By the time Contessa Binaldi rose to go he felt thoroughly convinced of the success of the afternoon, and he had almost forgotten those passionate and imprudent words that Helen had uttered.

CHAPTER III

As Helen was not well enough to come downstairs to dinner that evening, Rina dined alone with her grandfather. Once or twice the old man considered the possibility of informing her as to the purport of Maria Binaldi's visit, but a certain embarrassment kept him silent. There would be no harm in waiting until to-morrow, and a little delay would serve to keep Antonio in a becoming state of humility. Although his worldly advantages were very great, he must not attach an exaggerated importance to them; he must be made to feel that nothing was quite good enough for Pasquale Ubinaldi's granddaughter.

Helen's words, it must be said still caused him a good deal of uneasiness, and he felt anxious to know on what grounds she had so confidently asserted that Rina would never marry Antonio. That Helen, who was usually the most amenable and gentle of women, should suddenly display such unaccountable obstinacy, first on the subject of Rina's going to England and then about her marriage, filled him with a very real dismay. He felt as if he had been living side by side with a stranger for twenty years. He had admired and loved Helen, although he had never envisaged the unselfish sacrifices she had made for him in thus tending his declining years. And though he still loved her, his admiration for her had undergone that afternoon a very perceptible change.

She was still looking pale and tired at the midday breakfast—which was the first meal at which they all assembled—on the following day, and she did not come down to his study as was her wont in the afternoon. It was nearly tea-time and he was still alone. The afternoon had proved cold and he was forbidden by the doctor to venture out-of-doors. Finding himself unable to give his usual attention to the perusal of the *Corriere* he sent for Rina. He was told that she had been out driving with Contessa Binaldi and had only just come in.

Five minutes later Rina appeared, looking flushed and animated. The cold wind had brought a little color to her pale face and her eyes were very brilliant. Her corn-colored hair made an almost vivid patch of color in the faded splendor of the old room.

"Come here, my dear," said the old man.

Rina advanced. She had expected to find her mother there, and was surprised and not altogether agreeably so to find the old man alone. Surely it

must be nearly tea-time? She had been half afraid that she had stayed out too late, but Maria had driven out to Careggi and had not started so early as usual. It actually occurred to her that he had perhaps sent for her to rebuke her on some small matter of behavior. It would not have been the first time, but Rina was approaching an age when she resented being treated like a child, to be scolded or rebuked whenever her conduct or conversation did not come up to the difficult, old-fashioned standard laid down by her grandfather. Maria Binaldi had told her that it was simply absurd for a girl of her age to be kept in such a state of repression.

These thoughts, however, were very carefully concealed within that bright young head of hers; they had never been translated into words. Rina unconsciously took her cue from her mother. She submitted, but inwardly she determined that one day she would rebel and make a bid for freedom.

She was tall and molded on fine strong lines. There was arrogance in the carriage of her head, poised gracefully on the slim white neck. Her dark eyes were long, and set wide apart under black, defined eyebrows. She had more spirit, more fire than her mother. The old prince looked at her and then began his usual set of questions concerning her comings and goings. She always had to render a very strict account of all that she had done during the day.

"You have been out, my dear?"

"Yes."

"Did you drive to-day?"

"Yes, I went to Careggi with Contessa Binaldi."

"You were alone with her?"

"Yes."

A very slight smile of approbation curved his lips.

"She is a charming woman. I hope you appreciate her companionship?"

"Indeed I do, grandpapa. I find her delightful." There was a touch of enthusiasm in her manner.

"Antonio did not accompany you?"

"No—he hardly ever drives with her and never if I'm there."

"But you saw him?"

"No. He is in the country to-day."

"He is a very amiable young man. A devoted brother."

"He is a bore!" said Rina, with a sudden smile that lit up her face in a charmingly roguish way. "I sometimes wonder if he bores his sister too. She is so very intelligent!"

The old man frowned. The frown quickly banished the smile from Rina's lips and eyes. She felt aggrieved. It was impossible to express herself freely even upon so unimportant a subject as that of Antonio Delfini.

"I forbid you to speak in that impertinent way," said the old man, with angry severity. "You will please to remember that Antonio is nearly twice your age. You are not to speak of him with such disrespect—such insolence."

Rina was a little taken aback by his sudden anger. She was silent under the reproof, for experience had taught her wisdom in this respect. But her resentment was none the less deep. What had she said or done to merit this sharp rebuke? She was puzzled as well as annoyed. Really, her grandfather was becoming more impossible every day!

"If you have no other reason you should not speak of him like that because he is your friend's brother," said the old prince.

Rina was still silent, waiting for the little storm

to pass. She had half expected to be sent out of the room in disgrace, and could hardly tell whether she was relieved or disappointed that this command did not follow. She had felt happy and a little excited this afternoon. The swift drive in the open motor-car had braced her nerves. And her friend, vivid, picturesque, intelligent, had talked to her in a way that seemed to transport her into a totally different world. A world of books and music and pictures, and of human beings who were really free and alive. It had made her a little impatient and perhaps dissatisfied with the changeless atmosphere of the old palace.

It must be delightful to enjoy such perfect freedom as Maria possessed. She envied her friend's lot, and by contrast her own seemed gray and deficient in color and movement.

Had she known it, the chief cause of her offending had lain in the fact that she had by her own thoughtless and impetuous words made it impossible for her grandfather to say the very important things which he had sent for her to hear. She had called Delfini a bore, she had spoken of him with a touch of scorn, and all the time he had been wondering how he could best and most delicately intimate to her that Antonio Delfini desired to make her his wife. Really, the girl was getting beyond all bearing.

She was looking extraordinarily pretty to-day, and he was the more disappointed to learn that Delfini had not seen her. Perhaps Maria Binaldi, who talked too much to be invariably prudent, had told the girl how good-looking she was and turned her head a little. A snub such as he had just administered would do her no harm. It would counteract any foolish flattery she had received from Maria. By this time he had almost forgotten Lady Elling-

ton's invitation, for the announcement of Rina's betrothal would effectually put a stop to the ridiculous idea of sending her to England. If she went to England at all, she should go as Antonio's wife.

Tea was brought in, and then Helen made her appearance. Although she had heard nothing that had passed on the preceding day between the old prince and Maria she felt afraid that the subject of Rina's marriage must have been discussed. She knew that she had not heard the last of that scheme, and she dreaded the moment when it would be sprung upon herself and possibly upon her daughter. She glanced at Rina as she came in, and she quickly discerned that all was not quite smooth. There was a deep, settled frown upon old Pasquale's brow, and Rina was looking uncomfortable and rather depressed, as she always did if her grandfather spoke sharply to her. Perhaps he had been venting some of his own annoyance of yesterday upon her.

Helen sat down and began to pour out the tea. She talked quietly of ordinary things, but Rina said very little. She sat there with the firelight weaving flamelike tints in her hair, very still, and rather subdued.

When tea was over the girl rose and was moving toward the door when Prince Ubinaldi said sharply:

"Sit down. I have something to say to you."

Rina sat down obediently, feeling a little frightened. From his manner she thought he was going to scold her again. She was aware, too, that her mother bestowed upon her a quick, nervous glance.

"You are twenty years old, Rina. It's time you were married," said the old prince.

He did not look at Helen, but fixed his keen eyes upon Rina's face with a hard scrutiny that brought the color to her cheeks.

"There is no one I'd sooner see you married to

than Antonio Delfini. He has done me the honor to approach me on the subject. He is aware, of course, of your great friendship for his sister."

Rina was not flushed now; she was as pale as a lily.

"Oh, grandpapa, I wouldn't marry Conte Delfini for all the world," she said.

Helen's heart gave a little throb. It was exactly what she had expected and even hoped that Rina might say. Antonio Delfini was a most excellent man, but he would never make Rina happy; he was too old, too sedate, too unimaginative.

"You will obey me in this matter," said the old prince. "You will not even be consulted."

And then almost before Helen could realize it, there came the clash of the two wills in a struggle which she had dreaded for years. Rina sprang to her feet, pale and trembling. Helen tried to restrain her, but she might as well have tried to restrain the Arno when it was in flood.

"Why should I obey you? Why should I not be consulted about a matter which concerns me far more than it concerns you? I am not your daughter—why should you try to arrange my life for me? You have no right to it! It is my life—my very own—and you shall not spoil it!"

There was fire in her eyes. She looked a splendid creature at that moment, alive, beautiful, but almost dreadful in that sudden fierceness of rebellion.

A sensation of cold faintness came over Helen. She longed to stop the girl, to implore her to be temperate and controlled, and not to speak to her grandfather in that manner. But she found herself powerless to interfere. She was an onlooker, and all that mattered, all that was significant now, seemed to be concentrated in the words that Rina uttered.

"I've told you already what I think of him. He bores me—he isn't at all like his sister. I refuse to marry him!"

The old man's eyes flashed dangerously. In all his life no one had ever spoken to him like that before. He could never remember the day when his word had not been law.

"You *shall* marry him," he said angrily. "I will not have this rebellion. Helen, your daughter has taken leave of her senses."

"I have done nothing of the kind," said Rina, carried away now by passion. "I am as sensible as any of you, and I won't marry Conte Delfini. I'll tell his sister so. She will understand even if you don't!"

Yet even as she spoke she wondered if after all it would be quite so easy to make her refusal known to Contessa Binaldi. Although Maria had so little in common with her brother, they were very close and intimate friends. She was a woman without illusion, and if she knew that her swift intelligence evoked little response from him she did undoubtedly love him very dearly. He was the pivot of her life, and it was quite certain that she must be in his confidence. Rina knew that Antonio would never marry without his sister's approval. Perhaps her very friendship had been based upon her desire to win the girl, so as to pave the way for him. Rina felt as if a deliberate intrigue had unfolded itself before her eyes. She had been flattered by Maria's evident liking for her, her gay and amusing comradeship. And all the time she had been in the plot; she had known that Antonio wanted to marry her!

The girl felt thoroughly disillusioned and unhappy. Now that the first storm of anger had passed she was beginning to feel a little ashamed

of her conduct. She could never remember feeling quite so angry before, and she knew that she must have made her mother very unhappy.

Her one little taste of freedom—of the outer air—had been derived from those frequent walks and drives with Maria Binaldi. And it had been a trap to ensnare her, Contessa Binaldi had perhaps been thinking all the time: "My brother is in love with this girl. I will make friends with her, and then when the time comes she won't like to refuse him." Sometimes she had even laughed at Antonio to Rina, speaking with good-humored toleration of his grave, sedate ways, his disinclination for any kind of society or gaiety. But always she had been careful to show Rina that she loved him very much. She was a very clever woman—far too clever for poor Rina—who had believed that Maria had admired her for herself, for her quick intelligence, perhaps for her beauty, for the older woman had subtly flattered her on all these points. It was very mortifying to discover that all this flattery and attention had been showered upon her for an ulterior purpose which she had been too blind to discern. There had been that hateful motive of *interessi* at the back of it all. Perhaps sister and brother had smiled at what seemed to be the growing success of their little scheme when they were alone together. And if the old prince and Maria were in accord upon the matter, how could she, Rina, possibly escape from the marriage they proposed for her? With Antonio they seemed to form in her eyes a powerful little band of silent conspirators.

In desperation she turned to her mother. Helen had so far remained silent, and she had given her daughter no clue as to her opinion upon the vital matter now at stake. She had sat there, pale, motionless, a passive spectator of the little drama.

"Mother, say that I needn't make this marriage! Surely you are on my side? Surely you won't force me?"

She flung herself upon her knees at Helen's feet, and clasped her hands in passionate entreaty.

"Mother, speak to me! Speak to me!"

Helen did not speak, but she bent her head and very gently kissed the little flushed face that was upturned toward her. And, although she said nothing, the little significant action conveyed to Rina a reassuring sense of sympathy, and, what was of even more importance, of support. It made the girl feel a little ashamed of her outburst, as if it had been exaggerated and melodramatic. There is always something theatrical about this sudden falling upon one's knees before another human being. Even at the time she hotly remembered how Contessa Delfini would have mocked at her for displaying such emotion, in that half-satirical way of hers that was so amusingly bitter when directed against other people's foibles, but could, she imagined, be very painful and wounding if suddenly employed against oneself. Somehow Rina had never thought of that before when she had listened full of admiration to her friend's witty sallies at the expense of others. And if Contessa Delfini could see her now what would she say—what would she think? Certainly she would tell her that it was always absurd to lose control of oneself and to behave like a tragedy queen. But she had been frightened by her grandfather's attitude, by his strict, stern tone. She had felt that he was capable of sending for Conte Delfini and announcing their betrothal immediately with all the accustomed formalities that made it so binding a ceremony for both parties.

"Get up, dear," whispered Helen.

Her air of calm authority quieted Rina, who

obeyed at once and rose to her feet. She became suddenly controlled as if ashamed of her impetuous behavior.

"I think Rina had better go up to her room," said Helen very quietly, turning to the old prince. "When she is in a more reasonable mood we can discuss the matter again."

He gave an assenting grunt.

"She'd better stay there till she comes to her senses. No gadding about—do you hear me, Rina? You've still got to learn, it seems, who is master here!"

His fierce eyes flashed. At eighty he had no intention of doffing the insignia of authority. And women were made to be ruled first by their parents and then by their husbands. All these modern notions of independence were ridiculous and unseemly, and could only lead to frivolous or even immoral conduct. Every effort would be made to secure Rina's eventual happiness, but she must learn to submit to the will of her guardians. It was a preposterous English notion that judged a girl to be competent to choose her own husband.

When she had left the room—carrying her head more arrogantly than usual, as if to compensate for that moment of abject self-abasement when she had fallen upon her knees before her mother—he turned sharply to Helen.

"What can she possibly have against him? He's the best *parti* in Florence, and she ought to thank her stars that he wants her to be his wife. He's got every penny of his mother's fortune—she belonged to those rich Genoese shipbuilders. I remember we thought it was a *mésalliance* when old Antonio married her, but all he said was, 'I mean to keep my property for my children.' I dare say

he was wise. Rina will have a miserable dot and when I'm dead what will you two women do? Sell the villa at Settignano, which you know is all I can leave you, and go and live in some poky cottage in England? You won't have much choice."

"I would rather live in poverty and see Rina living in poverty than let her marry a rich man she doesn't love," said Helen quietly.

"Love! You are talking like an ignorant, sentimental girl, Helen! I really don't know what's come over you these days—you used to be so sensible. But it's no use your behaving in this foolish way, for I mean to see this matter through. I have arranged Rina's future perfectly satisfactorily, and I won't have any interference from either of you. And when the child comes to think it over quietly she will see how impossible it is for her to offend her best friend by refusing to marry that friend's brother. Maria Binaldi was here yesterday, she came on her brother's behalf. She is, of course, extremely anxious for the marriage to take place. That is a great compliment to Rina, for you know people say that she has always stood in the way of Antonio's marrying."

"Father," said Helen. She did not often address him in this way, and when she did, it meant that she was very serious indeed. "Rina is very young. Let her go to England now for a few weeks, and perhaps when she comes back she will feel differently about it. It's no use trying to force her into a marriage she doesn't like. Let her be free for a few months—a year—longer, if necessary."

"Oh, you can't throw dust in my eyes, Helen! It was to get her out of the way of Maria Binaldi and her brother that you proposed to send her to England. You saw this coming and you are determined to prevent it. I think you are mad. You

can have nothing against the man, and yet you are doing all you can to incite Rina to rebel."

He had penetrated unerringly to the motive that had originally prompted her to welcome so eagerly Lady Ellington's invitation. She had hardly dared acknowledge it even to herself, but she had for some time feared the logical conclusion of Maria Binaldi's friendship for Rina; she had guessed whither it might tend.

"She will have her jewels, her automobiles, her carriages, and an excellent and pious husband. What more can a girl want? If she's such a fool as to flout him, what has she to look for in the future? There isn't a single other Florentine I'd let her marry, and she must please understand that! There isn't any one she's seen and fancied, is there?" he demanded with renewed anger and looking at Helen with frowning suspicion.

"Of course there is not. Rina has never thought about marriage at all. I do not know what notions Maria Binaldi may have put into her head," said Helen.

She sighed. On the face of it and from a worldly point of view there was a great deal to be said for the marriage. And the outlook for the future was even more grave and precarious than the old prince had suggested to her. He had not been clever at business, and he had lost a good deal of money through unfortunate speculation. When he died the old palace and most of the property in the Casentino would go to his great-nephew Vincenzo, who had married a very rich American woman. But she resolutely banished from her mind such thoughts as these. Rina was young and beautiful. She should not be tied down to a loveless marriage, however advantageous. Excellent as he was, Antonio was incapable of understanding her. And she

required guidance, sympathy, and understanding. She was impetuous, self-willed; but she had noble qualities, and they were capable of development.

Helen rose.

"I am sorry we have had such an unhappy afternoon," she said, "and I do hope you will try to forgive Rina for speaking to you as she did. It was very wrong of her, but she forgot herself; the child has a hot temper. I am sure she will be very sorry." She made the vicarious apology in a quiet, reserved tone, as if Rina, in spite of her passionate outburst, was not wholly to blame.

"You are supporting her—encouraging her. It's very wrong and foolish of you, Helen. You'll be sorry one of these days. It'll fall more heavily on you than upon any one."

She went up to him and kissed him; she could not bear to be at variance with him for long.

"You must forgive her. She is in some ways so very like dear Andrea," she said, uttering that beloved name in the reverent tone she always used, when indeed she could bring herself to speak it aloud.

Then she left the room and went in search of her daughter. For as yet she had never told Rina that in this crucial matter she was strongly on her side, and did not want her to marry Antonio Delfini.

CHAPTER IV

HELEN was reaping the bitter harvest of an early mistake that dated back to the first months of her widowhood. It was due perhaps more to her disposition than to actual initiative on her part, for she was the kind of woman who yields easily to discipline, and from those first days of bitter and blind-

ing sorrow, when she had watched her beloved dying before her eyes, she had allowed her father-in-law to administrate not only her affairs, but also to arrange all the details of her own and her child's life. There was a good deal to be said for her immediate submission, and no one could really blame her. To begin with, the old palace was his and he would not hear of her leaving it. They had their own apartments quite separate from his, and they could lead their own life. Helen only learned by degrees how little freedom was to be hers to settle anything for herself or the little girl. He wanted Rina to be absolutely Italian, a perfect Florentine, and her nurses and governesses were always Italian women; he would not, even at first, permit Helen to have an English nurse for her. The two principal meals of the day were always taken with the old prince in his own apartment, and little Rina was obliged to come downstairs as soon as she was old enough. She had late dinner with them as Italian children almost always do, though Helen, with her English ideas, passionately disapproved of the practice. He objected to sending Rina to school and insisted that she should be taught by governnesses at home. He paid for her education and was extremely liberal; she was allowed to study music and painting and anything else she had a fancy for. But he seemed to think that because she was his son's daughter he had absolute power to control her life. He chose her friends and acquaintances, and even as a child she was permitted to visit few houses.

Helen herself made no friends outside his own immediate circle of relations and friends. She never went into English society in Florence, and only saw those people whom she had known in England if they happened to be staying there for a few weeks. At first, crushed and miserable and ill with grief as

she was, there had been no hardship for her in all this. She shrank from her fellow-creatures and preferred the solitary and quiet life in the old palace. Her father-in-law's need of her seemed to be great, and she was thankful for the occupation that it brought, as well as the opportunities it offered for unselfishness and self-denial. So the years had gone on, and she had become so accustomed to the yoke which had never pressed too heavily on her shoulders that now she had ceased to feel it at all. But she had become sharply and suddenly aware of its effect upon Rina. She saw the difficulty of extricating and freeing herself from that ancient habit of obedient acquiescence now that her daughter's interests were so vitally threatened.

Never had she thus opposed the old prince before. It was terrible to her nature to have to do it, and only the exigencies of the situation constrained her to persevere. Her loyal and simple soul detested the hard task that was set before it. She must join hands with one or other of these two opposing forces; she must by doing so wound one or other of these two people who were so dear to her.

Rina was sitting in her room when her mother entered it that evening. It was at the back of the house and overlooked a beautiful old courtyard, square with a pillared loggia running round all four sides of it and a space of green in the center with palms and shrubs and an ancient fountain where a marble boy poured water from a conch into a dolphin's mouth. The spring night was cold, nevertheless the window was wide open and Rina was sitting near it, her head resting on her hand. She had been crying, for her eyes were still wet and her face was unusually flushed.

Helen went up to her and kissed her.

"Dear, you shouldn't have spoken like that. It was very wrong and rude and disrespectful."

The mother and daughter invariably spoke English when they were alone together, for Helen had been determined that Rina should know her language. When they were with the old prince they always spoke Italian.

"I am sorry," said Rina. She put out her arms and drew her mother's face down to hers. "Darling mother, you do take my part; don't you? You musn't be against me now. He was horrid, wasn't he? Somehow I never realized before how selfish and domineering he is!"

"Hush, hush, my dear," remonstrated Helen. The words hurt her sense of loyalty. She was intensely loyal to Andrea's father.

"I am not going to obey him," said Rina, "and you must help me. You must find a way out."

She looked at her mother and a sense of despair struck her heart. What help could she give her? She was a pawn in the old man's hands; no daughter could have shown him a more servile obedience.

"I will try to help you, Rina darling," said Helen in her quiet, smooth voice. "I *want* to help you," she added.

Rina looked at her.

"You've done what he's told you all these years. You've been like a slave without a single opinion of your own. How can you help me?"

"I can send you away," answered Helen. "I can send you to England."

"To England?" echoed Rina in amazement.

"Your aunt would be very glad to have you. And when you come back you might feel very differently about many things—about Antonio Delfini for instance."

"Never about him!" said Rina passionately.

"You are so fond of Maria Binaldi. It seems strange you should dislike her brother so much."

"He's not at all like her—even she says so," said Rina. "And to-day I feel differently even about her. I feel as if she were in the plot that has been hatched against me. She's made it more difficult for me—for all of us!"

Rina was almost always intimate and frank with her mother, and Helen encouraged this attitude.

"You see," she went on reflectively, "I thought she liked me for myself, though I was only a girl and so much younger and she has such quantities of friends, and then she's so clever and brilliant. It hurts me a little to think that perhaps she only made friends with me because her brother wanted to marry me. I can't imagine what put such an idea into their heads, for I have never been at all nice to him—he made me feel shy and awkward, and Maria never did that. And I can't imagine why she wanted me to marry her tiresome bore of a brother. Yes, I will say it, mother, and you musn't scold me." Her face broke into enchanting smiles. "And when will you be able to take me to England to Aunt Theresa's?"

"I shall not be able to take you myself. I can't leave your grandfather. But I can send you. I have been thinking about it for some time past. I've wanted you to know England—to know my country."

Rina was sobered. Her mother's restful qualities almost always tranquilized her.

"But I shan't like leaving you," she said, leaning toward her and clasping both her hands in hers. "I don't think I can go without you. I've never been away from you."

"It is the only plan I can think of. I'm expecting Mrs. Proctor next week—we might arrange for you

to travel with her. I should feel that you were quite safe then—she is such an old friend of mine, and then she is an experienced traveler."

Rina shook her head.

"I should hate it," she announced.

"I don't see what else we can do. If you stay here your grandfather will never be satisfied until your betrothal is announced. You know he has a very strong will, and then he has always arranged everything for us. I don't see how you could fight your way out without a great deal of unpleasantness, made all the worse because of your friendship with Maria Binaldi."

"I often wondered why I was allowed to be friends with her," said Rina. "Even grandfather would have been shocked at some of the things she used to say to me. It was she who first told me what a slave you were—how you'd spent twenty years of your very youth in dancing attendance upon him. She has often told me how much happier women are when they are rich and free and can arrange their own lives!"

"I never cared for you to see so much of her," said Helen. "She is a very worldly woman, and she is not so *bien-pensant* as her brother. But as your grandfather didn't object, I said nothing."

"I'll never go near her again!" cried Rina. "I'll show her what I think of all her plotting and scheming. Mother—it's impossible. I won't marry Toni Delfini and there's an end of it!"

She sprang up and stood in front of her mother, full of life and energy, a vision of youth incarnate.

"I won't—I won't!" she repeated, pirouetting and twirling about the room. "I don't think I want to marry at all—not for years, at least. And to have Toni always there feeling shocked at me—I simply couldn't bear it, you know, mother."

Helen was also perfectly convinced upon this point. She sighed, for behind all her gaiety Rina was a very determined person and she had the iron will of the Ubinaldi.

"Then you must let me manage this for you," said Helen. "You have to choose between two paths. You either must stay here and allow yourself to be betrothed to Antonio, or you must go to England for the next few months. A great deal can happen in a few months."

It would make a break, and a break of some sort had become imperatively necessary. The clash of those two wills prolonged in a fierce contest would be too terrible a thing, and worse than she had ever anticipated. She looked further and saw the detrimental effects of it upon Rina's soul. She saw that it must affect her character, and perhaps turn all its youth and sweetness to bitterness. There were many possibilities in Rina, as there are in most human souls—capabilities of great nobility and sacrifice, as well as the more terrible ones of ruthless determination and passionate obstinacy. She was the child of mixed races, and she was beginning to show it. Sometimes those two nationalities seemed almost to be at war within her, as if striving for the mastery of that young and vivid personality.

Helen rose and again she kissed her daughter with something of wistful tenderness.

"I shall leave you to think it over," she said calmly. "You must decide this for yourself—no one can help you. Look well into your own heart. You have never thought of Antonio before as a man who loves you and wishes you to be his wife. Sometimes even that very fact makes a difference to one's estimate of a person. If you loved him, my dear Rina, there is no one to whom I would rather give you. You would have the love of a

good man to help you through life. He has also a great deal to give you from a worldly point of view, and if anything happens to your grandfather we shall not be at all well off. Most of the property goes to Vincenzo, so he has very little to leave to us. That will not count with you, I know, but it is right you should know these things, and you must look at the matter quite seriously from every point of view. Do not forget to pray for guidance that you may act wisely and well."

Rina listened to her mother's words. When Helen had finished speaking she put out her hand and tried to detain her.

"Don't go away yet, mother. I want to ask you something. Do you think my grandfather will let me go to England? You know he has always refused before."

"Naturally he disapproves of the idea, and it is very hard and difficult for me to oppose him. But this is a matter of duty, and I shall do it for your sake, Rina."

"But he is so horrible when one goes against him," protested the girl.

"He is not accustomed to being thwarted."

"You have given in to him always!" There was a hint of reproach in her tone. "Even Maria Binaldi says she wonders at your submission—your weakness, she calls it."

"I do not wish to hear Maria Binaldi's opinion of my actions," said Helen haughtily. "And there has never been any real need for me to oppose his wishes."

"And there is now?"

"I think there is," answered Helen.

Rina had often wondered at her mother's calm and contented acceptance of that autocratic rule; she had even, prompted by Maria Binaldi's out-

spoken criticism, condemned her mother a little for being so weak and yielding, and for never asserting her own will. That there had been real and patient self-sacrifice and self-effacement had not occurred to her. She had come to think that Helen's personality must be naturally quiet and colorless, unconvulsed by passions or strong opinions of any kind. This criticism had been the logical outcome of her intimate friendship with Maria Binaldi, who discussed everything and every one quite frankly. But her mother was appearing to-day in quite a new light, and one that would have astonished and perhaps annoyed Maria if she had been aware of it, and particularly of the cause of Marchesa San Raimondo's sudden self-assertion.

"How good you are," said Rina softly, and as if the admiration were forced from her.

"No, I am not good. But you are my own child and I must do my duty by you. I must shield you from making mistakes that might have long and unhappy consequences."

"Mistakes—such as if I were to marry Toni?" inquired Rina.

"Yes. And mistakes such as you might make inadvertently in refusing a good man's love without realizing its worth—in ignorance of your own heart."

"But mother dear, you can't possibly imagine that I'm in love with Toni? He bores me to tears. You can't want me to marry him."

"Not unless you can love him—as a wife should. These things are new to you, and I want you to remember that life isn't romance."

"I don't love him at all," pronounced Rina. "To-day I almost hate him and his intriguing sister. What right has she to interfere in my life?"

"I must go." Helen moved a step toward the

door. Then she paused. "My dear, there is one thing more."

"Yes, mother?" Rina's face was very serious.

"I think you must apologize to your grandfather. You must tell him you are sorry you spoke so rudely —so passionately."

Rina flushed.

"You know I simply hate apologizing to him. He never meets one half way. He'll only say: 'I am glad, Rina, you have the sense to recognize how badly you behaved'!" She mimicked her grandfather's precise and formal tones. "It makes me mad and I want to answer him back!"

Helen smiled half-sadly.

"Oh, my dear child, you are dreadfully undisciplined. When will you learn humility and control?"

"That is what Padre Bernardo says," said Rina laughing. "But I'm not good like you. "You've been a saint to put up with him all these years—to bear his pride and temper and obstinacy. I should have packed up and gone back to England long ago. Why didn't you?"

"And if I tell you that I didn't wish to go back?"

"Perhaps you accepted it all as a mortification?" said Rina, a little recklessly.

"No—I am not good like that. And I was very young—hardly older than you. I did it at first for quite another reason."

"Won't you tell me?" said Rina.

Her mother rarely spoke of the past to her, and Rina had a strong, youthful curiosity on the subject.

"It was your dear father's wish," said Helen with a quivering lip.

Even Rina was a little abashed then, for she saw that she had touched an intimate grief, a deep wound that had remained unhealed through eighteen

years. But before she had time to speak again Helen had closed the door and gone out of the room.

CHAPTER V

LEFT to herself, Rina's thoughts were concentrated far less upon Antonio Delfini than upon his sister Maria. Truth to tell, there was more than a little admixture of shame when she reflected upon her own eager admiration of Contessa Binaldi. She had said on the impulse of the moment that she almost hated her, and she was aware that she did not wish at present to see her again. Maria would never believe that Rina had all the time been ignorant of the little scheme that was weaving itself around her, and she would certainly think she had lent herself to the plot. Maria, who had frequently complimented her upon her quick intelligence, would refuse to believe her guilty now of such obtuseness where her own affairs were concerned. She must have looked upon her not only as perfectly cognizant of Antonio's hopes, but also quite willing to accede to them. And Rina would never be able to persuade her that she had been blind to all other issues; she had only thought how agreeable it was to enjoy, and to be allowed to enjoy without reproof or hindrance, the delightful friendship of Maria Binaldi.

Now that the whole scheme had been unfolded before her astonished eyes her first resolution was that she would always avoid Maria as far as possible in the future. It was a rash resolve, for she had not taken into consideration the immeasurably

stronger will of Maria, nor had she reckoned upon that lady's insensibility to defeat.

Prince Ubinaldi's first letter to Antonio had been brief and non-committal. Helen, he said, wished that her daughter might have a few days in which to reflect upon the matter, and he had agreed to this condition. This answer was not at all what Maria had anticipated, and she found it far from encouraging. It corresponded, indeed, much more to the diffident and timid hopes and fears expressed so humbly by Toni himself, and showed her that the Ubinaldi family were evidently less enchanted at the prospect than she had imagined possible.

She did not go to see Rina in the days that followed, because she knew that if she saw her it would be impossible for them not to discuss the matter, and this the old prince had requested her not to do. When he said a thing he meant it, and Maria was far too much afraid of injuring her cause by thwarting him to run the risk of disobeying. A false move at this critical juncture might have destroyed all her careful schemes. She had counted upon Rina's acquiescence, and the prince had been very far from discouraging, so where the difficulty lay she could not quite see. That it lay both with Helen and her daughter Maria Binaldi with all her cleverness and perspicuity never imagined.

After some days had passed and the affair still remained in abeyance—a fact which appeared to worry her far more than it worried Toni—Maria determined to seek an accidental meeting with Rina. To do this she went at eight o'clock one morning to Mass at the Church of the Santissima Trinità. It was the girl's habit to go there at eight because she found it too early to attend the seven o'clock Mass in the private chapel of the palace. The

old prince never slept late, and he always attended Mass at that hour and would not have dreamed of changing the time to suit the indolent ways of an indulged generation. It was only since she grew up that Rina had been permitted to have this extra indulgence of sleep in the morning, but Helen had formed the opinion that her health required it. Rina found even eight o'clock too early on the cold and dark winter mornings, and she had sometimes felt inclined to grumble at the discipline which prescribed the practice. Maria Binaldi had laughed at her for a little *dévote* when she first heard of it, but Antonio, who was present, had checked her by saying it was the best way in which to begin the day. Indeed, the knowledge had made Rina seem if possible more attractive in his eyes than before, for every man prefers the woman he loves to be religiously minded.

Maria Binaldi was a little late, for she was not accustomed to be devotional in what she called the small hours. She knelt rather in the background and presently she discerned Rina with her maid kneeling at some little distance from her. She was very quietly dressed in a dark shade of blue that looked almost black in the twilight of the church. But her yellow hair, showing beneath her hat, seemed to make a patch of sunlight in the gloom, just like one of those nimbus-decked saints over the old altars in the side-chapels.

Maria felt a certain pleasure in contemplating Rina thus unobserved. When she stood up for the Gospel she looked so tall and graceful, and one felt in seeing her thus that she would be swift and supple in her movements. She had a very marked look of race, Maria felt more and more that she was the only woman in the world for Toni, and her devotion to herself would make her unwilling to wrest any

power from her grasp. Maria would still rule and arrange, and feel the reins between her fingers to be pulled this way and that, always gently, of course, but always firmly.

She wondered then if Rina was thinking about Toni as she knelt there, her face hidden in her hands, absorbed in prayer. Was she praying for guidance? Was she thinking of the future—of the change that was so close to her?

When Mass was over Rina still remained on her knees and showed no signs of getting up and going away. It was now nearly nine o'clock and Maria began to feel impatient. She shivered, for the church was very cold and her feet felt like ice. She watched with growing irritation that still motionless figure, that bowed devout head. But she dared not go up to her and interrupt her. She felt that in the past few days Rina had become something of a stranger to her. She must certainly have learned that Toni wished to marry her, and both silence and delay seemed to point at least to a lack of eagerness in Rina to accept the lot offered to her. Maria comforted herself with the thought that Toni perhaps would not make a very instant appeal to a young girl. He was a sedate, rather silent, man, elderly for his years, slightly narrow in his views (not that that would be a disadvantage to one who had lived all her life in the Ubinaldi palace), and without charm of manner. He was reserved, and his love for Rina had made him dull and embarrassed in her presence. Maria had a practised eye for other people's failings, even when the people in question were near and dear to her, and she could not conceal from herself the fact that poor Toni had never been quite *à la hauteur* in the girl's presence. But he had many other things to recommend him which more than outweighed these superficial

disadvantages. He had possessions and qualities which would certainly make a profound appeal to the wise and prudent guardians of a young and adored girl. He was very rich; the Palazzo Delfini was the finest of the more modern palaces in Florence. It stood on the site of the old one which had been burned down. The Villa Delfini in Tuscany was a beautiful and fertile property and its wine and oil were famous; it offered a permanent place of *villeggiatura* to the young couple whenever they wished to escape from the heat and dust of the city. Antonio adhered to the very strict Catholic party to which his father had belonged; his views, like those of Prince Ubinaldi, were Black, and he was careful to choose his friends among those who held the same principles. That alone would make him immediately acceptable to the old prince and to the Marchesa San Raimondo. He was a pattern brother, and as long as his parents had lived he had been a pattern son. Rina, in marrying him, would have everything that a girl could possibly want, and she would escape from the tyranny of her autocratic old grandfather. She had scarcely seemed to realize that tyranny until Maria had by a few dexterous and judicious hints pointed it out to her, for she had her own reasons for wishing the girl to become dissatisfied with her present lot. But Maria had yet to learn that she would be hoist with her own petard. Rina meant to escape from that very tyranny in her own way. She had realized it just in time.

Maria became still more impatient. Rina must have finished her prayers long ago; she was surely staying in that position out of sheer perversity. Maria felt in anything but a devout mood, and she was physically upset by the fact of having risen an hour earlier than usual. It was now nine o'clock,

and she had a thousand things to do. She was actually beginning to contemplate the desirability of renouncing her plan of speaking to Rina and going home, when the girl suddenly rose, collected her books, genuflected, and moved toward the door. She was very pale and she left the church without raising her eyes. Maria slipped quickly after her; they met just outside the door.

Contessa Binaldi did not affect surprise, and if Rina felt any, she gave no hint of it. She greeted her friend coldly; there was even a little touch of haughtiness in her demeanor which would have amused Maria in so young and unsophisticated a girl if it had not awakened anew the fear that was lurking in her heart.

"My dear Rina, you are quite a stranger. You have not been near me for days!"

Rina looked at her with a straight gaze.

"I thought you would understand," she said coldly.

"Understand? How should I understand? Your silence has not been very illuminating, my dear."

Maria was still feeling very cold, and it lent a touch of asperity to her speech. She was beginning to wish, too, that she had not sought this interview with Rina. The girl was changed; she showed her none of that pretty and affectionate devotion to which Maria had become flatteringly accustomed, the glance she gave was so chilling as to be almost hostile.

"I am sorry—I will write," said Rina. She put out her hand and made a little movement as if she were in a hurry to go home.

Maria, however, had not waited for half an hour in a cold church for nothing; she refused to be so quickly defeated, and to be summarily dismissed by a mere child was galling to her pride.

"Is that all you have to say to me?" she asked. "I will come a little way with you, Rina. I suppose you are going home? I am very anxious to have a little talk."

They walked along the Lung' Arno down which great gusty draughts of keenest tramontana were blowing. Maria did not want to go out of her way to accompany Rina home, but there was no other course open to her unless she acknowledged defeat and left her at once. Rina walked on quickly and her maid followed behind them.

"It is difficult for me to speak to you now," said Rina. "I know we are both thinking of the same thing, but I don't want to discuss it with you."

Maria became more and more astonished. Rina had really changed into another person. She was no longer so sure that she would prove to be the amiable and amenable girl she had desired for Toni's wife.

"I have offended you, I suppose, by speaking to your grandfather?" she hazarded.

"I can't say. I would rather not talk about it. It is difficult to describe what I feel."

"But what are you going to do? You can't keep Toni waiting forever!" There was a sharpness in Maria's tone and more than a hint of reproach.

"I did not want to keep him waiting at all. I begged my grandfather to write at once. I thought it would be kinder and simpler."

"Kinder? Simpler?" echoed Contessa Binaldi. She had some difficulty in keeping her temper.

"I mean—it seemed unkind to raise false hopes."

"False hopes?" repeated Maria. "I think you had really better explain what you do mean."

"You see, I have known since the first moment my grandfather spoke to me that I could not marry Conte Antonio," said Rina in a low, troubled voice.

"Why do you make me say this, Contessa? Why did you force me to speak to you to-day? I am sorry—I am dreadfully sorry. I never dreamed you had this in your mind all the time. It was a most unpleasant surprise—it was almost a shock to me!"

"That is nonsense," said Maria, "you are not a baby, Rina, and your mother ought to have told you. You can't surely imagine that I took you about always for my own pleasure? You are very charming, I am sure, but you are far too young to be an amusing companion. Did you never ask yourself why I chose you as a friend among the dozens of girls in Florence?"

"I thought it was because you liked me," faltered Rina.

"Liked you? Of course, I liked you. But I like quantities of people, and I have numbers of intimate friends with whom I can talk far more freely than I could to you. And I was sorry for you. I pitied you for having to lead that dull, narrow life. You never went anywhere, you had no pleasures. I imagined you would be thankful to escape from it."

"Not in that way," said Rina quickly.

She began to wish that Maria would leave her. She was no match for her in a war of words, and the sharp speeches, the hint of patronizing pity, wounded her pride. But she clearly now discerned that Maria, her friend whom she had really cared for very much, had never cared for her at all, and was rapidly developing into an enemy or something that closely resembled one. She could not forgive her for not wishing to marry Toni.

Rina was inclined to exaggerate the hostility as once she had exaggerated the friendship. But Maria had really felt a certain condescending kind-

ness toward her, and she had liked her evident devotion; it had pleased her vanity.

Maria stopped, for they were nearing the Ubinaldi palace and she did not wish to run the risk of being seen from the front windows.

"Do you really mean then that I'm to go home and tell Toni you refused to marry him?" she asked.

"I should like him to be told as soon as possible. It seems so unfair to keep any one waiting so long. Grandpapa is very angry with me now—he has been hoping I shall change my mind."

Evidently pressure was being brought to bear. Maria did not to-day allude to the old man's tyranny; it was a less powerful asset in Toni's favor than she had imagined. She regretted that she had ever tried to make Rina more sensible of it, and that she had lost no opportunity in the past in inciting her to rebel.

"Very well, I will tell him," said Maria. "I think we had better say good-by to each other now."

They shook hands frigidly; both felt that there was something final in this leavetaking, but Rina's coldness as she said the words renewed the exasperation of Maria.

Her eyes flashed dangerously. She was thinking of Toni—of the hurt to him from which she knew that he would not quickly recover. Perhaps, indeed, he would never marry now; the rebuff at his age would check further effort. But she was thinking also of the wound to her own pride, the failure of her own schemes.

"I made the mistake of thinking you would welcome the opportunity of becoming my sister," she said; "there is hardly a girl in Florence who would not give almost anything to be in your shoes."

"The thought of becoming your sister never entered my head," said Rina simply.

"You must be extraordinarily obtuse," said Maria.

She turned abruptly away and crossed the road and when she had gone a little distance she paused and looked at the river. There had been heavy rains of late and a good deal of snow had fallen upon the mountains, and the Arno was in flood. A great rush of brownish water poured angrily between the arches of the old bridges as if it would have swept those ancient obstacles away in its turbulent fury. Tongues of yellow foam licked the brown stonework and splashed against the plinths. The river was bearing away with it a quantity of soiled and repulsive-looking débris; sometimes the body of a dead animal floated past. There were dark-looking clouds on the far horizon hanging densely above Vallombrosa and hiding the shapes of the hills. The sky promised more rain, and the wind from the north was icy, as if it had come for miles across frozen snow-fields. It made Maria Binaldi shiver in spite of the hot, fierce anger that possessed her. She wished she had spoken more bitterly to Rina; on looking back she could not remember that she had once made her wince.

Very well, then; she would go home and tell Toni. It was not a very agreeable prospect, but Maria was in too angry a mood to shrink from the task. She hoped, too, to be able to make him see how unworthy Rina had proved to become his wife, and how childish and stupid and unformed she was. Toni would not be quite unprepared for the news. As the days had gone by, bringing no further letter from the old prince, he had taken it as a sign of his rejection and he was prepared to accept that rejection with the humility of the man who has taught himself to

endure mortifications as a discipline of the soul. He would perhaps assert once more that he never had much hope, that he was unworthy of this bright, beautiful young girl; he would never agree that she was foolish to refuse to marry him. This attitude of self-depreciation maddened Maria and if Toni gave evidence of it this morning she feared that it might even make her irritable and impatient with him.

She was compelled to realize that even before their rather stormy meeting that morning Rina's affection for her had diminished. She had counted upon it as a factor that would undoubtedly contribute to the success of her scheme. And already it had undergone a change as if it had suffered a process of rapid and decisive disillusionment. Rina had extricated herself from the net that threatened to enmesh her with a kind of rough but simple effort. She had evidently defied her grandfather. This train of thought made Maria ask herself suddenly what part the Marchesa San Raimondo had played in the little drama? She must have been forced to take sides; even the calm and colorless Helen could not have remained perfectly neutral between these two belligerent parties. She had not thought it worth while to try to win Helen over to the project beforehand, for she had made the mistake of thinking that her opinion did not count for much in the Ubinaldi palace. She had overlooked the very close intimacy that could hardly fail to exist between a mother and her only daughter.

She rightly conjectured that Helen had thrown in her weight on the side of the girl, in the struggle that must certainly have taken place.

When she arrived at home she heard with some relief that Toni had gone out and had left word that he would not return before half-past twelve.

Maria went up to her room, sent for her maid, and made certain changes in her toilette, for she was aware that the rough wind had disarranged her hair. She was a pattern of neatness and order, and had extolled these virtues to Rina, whose sunny locks had been forthwith placed under a greater measure of restraint—a change which Helen had observed and disapproved in silence.

As the hour for luncheon approached Maria went down to her own sitting room—a charming apartment with a bright southern aspect. Although the whole house was heated by radiators a big wood fire blazed on the hearth. On the numerous tables and marble consoles large bowls of Tuscan pottery were filled with daffodils which in their abrupt and golden brightness seemed to redeem something of the gloom and sunlessness of the day. There was a grand piano in a plain ebony case on which some music was lying. Maria played well, even brilliantly, and it had been one of Rina's greatest pleasures to sit and listen to her friend's music. There were book-shelves filled with books, Italian, French, and English. Many of them were bound in the delicate Italian vellum tooled with faint patterns of gold. On the walls there were water-color drawings by modern French and Italian artists; some of them bearing the signatures of well-known men. On the parquet floors there were soft-toned rugs of Persian and Tunisian origin. It was the room of a woman at once wealthy and intelligent and artistic. Rina had longed to possess a room exactly like it; it had made her realize for the first time the narrowness of her own purse and the impossibility of asking her grandfather for money to spend. She had everything she could possibly require, he would certainly have told her, what more could she want? She had so few books, and Maria had awakened

within her a love for them, and had aroused a rebellious dissatisfaction at the restrictions placed upon her reading by her mother as well as by the old prince. Maria had been educating her not only for Toni but with a view to making her realize sharply the joys that freedom could bring to her. But it had all been time wasted; Rina was not going to secure release and emancipation and wealth by marrying Toni. On that point she seemed to be absolutely decided, and she was evidently offended with Maria for even having supposed the contrary.

Maria was in the midst of these thoughts when her brother entered the room. He was a slightly built man, scarcely of middle height, pale and rather artistic-looking, although he was not an artist and had little more than an intelligent appreciation of music and painting. His smooth, dark hair with threads of deep gold in it was thick and silky-looking and matched his beard. His features were decisively cut, and his eyes were brown, a few shades darker than his hair. They were very beautiful eyes and redeemed much that was insignificant in his personal appearance. He had a tranquil look and the grave and immobile expression of the habitually silent person. There would have been plenty of people in Florence who, had they been in possession of all the facts, would have confidently asserted that Rina Ubinaldi had made the greatest mistake in her life by refusing to marry Antonio Delfini.

It was sometimes said, unkindly perhaps, that Maria's more vigorous and fiery personality had repressed Toni, checking his development and keeping him more or less in the background. This was not at all true, for he had a far more solid intelligence than his sister, although it was less showy and superficial. But it was certainly true that he

preferred to leave many decisions to her which with a little energy and initiative he could quite well have made for himself. Her influence, her strong will, her rapid decisions had encouraged a certain tendency in him to solitude and diffidence. It had driven him also to a too modest conception of his own abilities and powers. He was naturally sweet-tempered and unselfish and wished Maria to be happy, for he knew that she had passed through a few years of very great and stormy unhappiness. When they had both been little their mother had once said: "Maria ought to have been the boy and Toni the girl." Such a criticism has doubtless often been made with truth of small children, before the strength of the boy has begun to assert itself. Only in this case it was certain that Maria retained the vigorous dominating character and Toni the sweet yielding one, just as they had done in the nursery.

Since the day in which his sister had approached old Pasquale Ubinaldi Toni had displayed a certain restless anxiety, though he had only spoken of his hopes and fears when Maria had insisted upon discussing them. There had been moments when he had patiently wished that she were less frank, but almost at once he had rebuked himself inwardly for disloyalty. Now as he came in, looking neat and *soigné* and even handsome in that pale attractive way, which, however, had appealed so little to Rina, he said quietly:

"Are there any letters, Maria?"

Maria put down the newspaper which she was studying.

"No," she said, "but I have seen Rina. I came across her in the Trinità this morning."

"In the Trinità?" echoed Toni. For it was not Maria's pious habit to go to an early Mass in all weathers, as Rina did, and the morning had been cold and threatening.

"It is not a festa?"

"No. At least I forgot to look. You ought to know best about that. I went principally to see if I could get a glimpse of Rina."

"And you saw her?" said Antonio in an unmoved way.

"Yes. I walked part of the way home with her."

"It was a cold morning for her to be out. She ought to be more prudent. She must have learned that indifference to weather from her English mother," he said, with a smile which showed his very even white teeth.

"No doubt," said Maria dryly.

"Did you speak of me? Have they told her? She knows?"

"Yes, she knows. They have told her."

Maria paused. She did not want to hurt Toni, and the knowledge that she must hurt him gave her an increasing feeling of resentment against Rina, who was the cause of his pain.

"She—she won't marry you, Toni," she said, and there was regret in her tone.

There was a long pause. Maria waited for her brother to speak, but apparently words had failed him; he took refuge in silence.

Presently Maria went on, but without looking at her brother.

"She didn't say very much—I think she is offended with me. From what she did say I gather that there has been war in the old palace between her and that pig-headed Pasquale. Your dear Rina won't be driven, for all she's such a good innocent little girl. No, Toni, you and I have got to wash our hands of the Ubinaldi, and I hope you will soon find a wife far more worthy of you."

"I shall never do that," said Toni abruptly.

He betrayed no sign of hurt, except in the in-

creased pallor of his face and that curious brightness of the eyes, which always with him expressed a deep emotion. Maria gave him one sharp look, then she averted her eyes. They sat there in silence.

"Why did not Pasquale write again?" he asked at last.

"As far as I could tell from her very disconnected story he has been hoping that she would yield. I dare say he thought he could force her to. But she didn't seem to want to talk about anything that had happened."

"Yield?" repeated Toni, frowning.

"To his wishes and yours," said Maria.

"I should not wish her to yield in that way," said Antonio.

"But it is the way the marriage would certainly have been arranged if she had not had an English mother," said Maria.

"Then must I say I am glad for her sake that she has one?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Toni," said Maria tartly, "she has refused the best *parti* in Florence, and she a girl with hardly a *soldo* to her dot. She had better go into a convent, for she is never likely to marry. Her mother must be a fool—I always suspected it. Rina is not a fool, but she is obstinate, which is almost worse! I am very sorry for your sake that I ever encouraged it. You are the one to suffer and both these tiresome women go scot-free!"

"But if Pasquale is really bringing pressure to bear upon her she may be suffering," said Antonio sorrowfully; "you have often said that he is hard and tyrannical and he is a man who has always had his own way. And I—I am the cause of it all."

He showed signs of distress for the first time, and it was at the thought of Rina's suffering and had no relation to the sharp pain that was tearing so savagely at his own heart. It came into his mind

that he was sorry he had left all the initiative to his sister, and he felt he would like to seek an interview with Rina and tell her of his deep regret for the pain and disturbance he had unwittingly caused. But he did not reveal this impulse to Maria. She would probably have pooh-poohed the idea. Nevertheless he kept turning it over in his mind, looking at it this way and that. The thought of seeking such an interview, not to press his suit but to apologize for causing her distress, appealed to him. He did not want to remain in her mind as associated only with bitter and painful memories.

All through luncheon Toni was absent-minded. He ate little food, as Maria observed, but it did not make her anxious, for he never had a large appetite. The affair occupied both their minds, but they saw the futility of further discussion just then. Maria was disappointed because instead of making him angry with Rina she had only succeeded in making him sorry for her. She herself had found it so easy to be angry with Rina, who had accepted so calmly the breaking of their friendship and seemed indifferent now as to whether it continued or not. She had always thought the girl's devotion had gone deeper than that. If she had been aware of the plan that was slowly taking shape in Toni's mind she would have been still more angry and she would certainly never have permitted it to materialize. It was characteristic of his slightly changed attitude that he did not reveal it.

CHAPTER VI

THAT same evening about six o'clock Antonio Delfini went to the Ubinaldi palace and asked to see the Marchesa San Raimondo. He was shown straight up to her apartment on the second floor.

It was the first time he had even been there; his few visits had always been paid to the old prince, who had been one of his father's most intimate friends.

A friendship that is carried on through more than one generation is apt to weaken in intimacy, and this had been the case with regard to the link between the two Florentine houses. Antonio had been several years younger than the prince's son Andrea, and had rarely seen him after his marriage. He knew Helen slightly and liked what he had seen of her, and it had been a real pleasure to him when Maria and Rina had taken to each other. He was sorry to think that perhaps now that friendship would be at an end.

Helen was alone, and when his name was announced she felt a little shock. Rina had told her of the interview she had had that morning with Maria, and she was afraid at first the young man had come to plead his cause again and try to enlist her sympathy on behalf of the suit. The thought made her a little nervous. But his calm, subdued aspect reassured her. There was nothing of the passionate, importunate lover about Toni.

"I daresay you are surprised to see me, Marchesa," he said with a smile.

"Oh, no; I am delighted," said Helen a little nervously, "do sit down."

"I wish to speak to you about your daughter," he said, feeling that nothing would be gained by delay; "you know that Maria saw her to-day?"

"Yes; Rina told me that they met coming out of church."

"I understand from her that your daughter is quite opposed to the thought of marrying me," said Antonio.

"Rina is such a child," said Helen, flushing, "it was altogether premature. She hardly knows you.

And of course she is very much distressed. I hope you will not blame her."

"Blame her? I should never dream of blaming her," said the young man warmly. "I am here to tell you that I feel distressed at the thought—the fear—that the prince might make things hard for her—might indeed insist upon her marrying me. It is always said in Florence that his least word is law—." He stopped and his shining eyes sought Helen's almost eagerly.

"So it has been up till now," said the Marchesa.

She raised her clear gray eyes to his face. She acknowledged to herself that she liked him to-day far better than ever before. She saw him as it were apart and distinct from his sister, for whom she had never cared, and a very vague regret came into her mind. What if she had acted ill-advisedly in supporting Rina's passionate opposition to the proposal of marriage?

"I should have been glad," she continued quietly, "if Rina could have been your wife. There is no one in Florence whom I would rather give her to. But I feel that you are not suited to each other and I am afraid she would not perhaps have been happy. She is young and headstrong and imaginative. I should like her to see a little of the world before she settles down."

"I believe I could have made her happy," said Conte Delfini, "I love her so very much."

Helen realized for the first time that he was suffering. More than once she had wondered if Maria had suggested the marriage to him and he had simply acquiesced without any particular enthusiasm, but now she saw her mistake. He did really love Rina, and was suffering because she did not return his love.

"If you will allow me to see your daughter I

should be very glad," said Toni. "It shall only be for a few minutes and I would say nothing to—to distress her."

Helen was silent. But she longed to comfort Toni—to make amends a little for all he had been through. There was really no one to blame unless one could remotely blame Maria for not being straightforward with Rina from the beginning.

"I should like to ask one question," she said slowly. "Is this your sister's suggestion?"

"No," he answered, "she does not know I am here. I think if she had known I was coming she would have tried to dissuade me."

Helen felt relieved. If this move had been planned by Maria it would have filled her with suspicion. But there was nothing subtle or intriguing about Conte Delfini; he was simple and straightforward and she was sure that he had no hidden motive in his request for this interview.

"You shall certainly see her," she said.

It was much easier to act when one was for the moment quite free from the domination of Maria and the old prince.

"Thank you," said Toni.

"If you will excuse me for a moment I will go and tell her that you are here," said Helen.

She thought it would be better to prepare her daughter a little for the interview that lay before her. She did not like to send for her and confront her with Toni without any preparation.

She went in search of her daughter. Rina's rooms were at the other end of the long passage; she was alone and reading and she looked up in some surprise as her mother entered.

"Rina, my darling, Conte Delfini has come and he wishes very much to speak to you."

"Oh, mother, I can't possibly see him! Why on earth has Maria sent him here?"

There was a look of dismay in her face.

"She does not even know that he has come—he told me so. I think he has something to say to you, and I've promised that you should see him. It would only be kind of you, Rina."

"Does my grandfather know that he's here?" inquired Rina.

"No, Delfini came to see me, not your grandfather."

"I don't feel as if I could see him," said Rina.

"It would be kinder," said Helen hesitatingly.

"You know that nothing he can ever say will make me change my mind," said Rina, with decision.

She went to the glass, smoothed her hair, arranged some lace at her throat; she even put on a little powder. Helen disapproved of this; it was a legacy of Maria's influence.

"Do I look all right?"

"I think you looked better before."

Rina laughed. She was very pretty when she was excited. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes shone.

"Now I'm ready. Am I to go alone?"

"Yes," said Helen.

Rina walked sedately to her mother's *salotto,* thinking that after all it was rather wonderful to have some one in love with you, even if you didn't care at all about him in return. It made one feel so very grown up, and perhaps rather attractive. She was filled with a girlish sense of conquest, and she had a kind of curiosity to see Antonio in this new light. She thought that she should like him better, now that she liked Maria so much less. Maria had contrived to put him in the shade by her

brilliant, scintillating presence, and perhaps for this reason Rina had never done him justice.

She entered the room. She was wearing a dark blue dress of soft charmeuse trimmed with little bands of fur. But Toni never noticed what she had on; he only thought she had never looked so beautiful before. It was, he thought, the first time he could remember seeing her without a hat, and the glory of her bright-colored hair entranced him. He had imagined that he could endure this ordeal which he had voluntarily set before himself without pain, yet the first glimpse of her sufficed to show him how singularly mistaken he had been.

"Mother said you wanted to see me," said Rina, hesitatingly.

They stood and faced each other.

"Yes," he answered, "I had something to say to you. From what my sister told me to-day I was afraid your grandfather was making things difficult for you. I came to tell you I was very sorry to be the cause of any disturbance between you. I never had very much hope." He stopped short and permitted his eyes to rest upon her face with a curious scrutiny that gave Rina an uncomfortable little thrill. "But I didn't want you to be distressed. Rather than that I would have kept silence all my life!"

It was an immense relief to her to feel that Toni did not blame her. The two people who blamed her and tried to make her feel like a naughty child were her grandfather and Maria. But Toni's attitude seemed to be only one of extreme solicitude for herself, that she should not suffer, that she should not be distressed. The chivalry of it touched Rina after all the hard words that had been used toward her of late.

"Grandpa is very angry with me for saying I

wouldn't marry you. But I don't care *that* for his anger!" She made a little gesture with her hand and smiled at Toni, who smiled back with sudden sympathy. "He is a tyrant—he's tyrannized over mother and me as long as I can remember. I used to envy children who hadn't got a grandfather!"

As she spoke she wondered if Toni had felt like that about sisters. Or was the tyranny of Maria a light, pleasant yoke? She longed to ask him.

"Anyhow," he said, "I'm very sorry to have been the cause of anything so hateful as a family quarrel. That is why I came to ask your forgiveness. I would rather you did not have a disagreeable remembrance of me full of unpleasant associations."

"Oh, indeed, I should never have that!" said Rina eagerly, "you have been far too kind, and I must seem simply hateful to you."

It did occur to her then that after all he cared for her in a kind, sympathetic, understanding way that made him seem suddenly almost like an intimate friend. She wondered why she had ever thought him a bore, and considered him so much less charming and agreeable than his sister. Now the two had abruptly changed places in her regard and she greatly preferred Toni.

"And it's I who ought to say I am sorry—to ask your forgiveness," she went on charmingly, and her low, soft voice gave the words a depth of meaning that was quite unintentional on her part. "For it *is* my fault, you know. You ought to be thinking me horrid and ungrateful instead of feeling sorry for me. You ought to say 'she's a little wretch and thoroughly deserves all she gets!' "

"You know I should never think or say such a thing as that," he said. "And I know I am much too old for you, Donna Rina. I am at least fifteen years older and it must seem a great deal to you.

I always felt it would be an obstacle and I told Maria so. But I love you very much. I should like you to remember that, if you care to. Not with annoyance or dislike, but so that you can tell yourself sometimes you have one friend in the world who would do anything for you, who would sacrifice his life for yours if necessary!"

"I shall always remember that, thank you," said Rina softly.

There was silence then, but there was no constraint nor awkwardness in the silence. Rina did not at all want Toni to get up and go away; she found him more interesting than he had ever seemed before, and she felt sorry that she did not love him and therefore could not marry him. But love was surely something different from this friendly feeling she had for him, something warmer and more wonderful that perhaps would make you feel as Toni did that it would be easy to die for the person you loved. But she would nevertheless have liked to keep him for a friend; there was something novel and delightful in the idea. But however delightful it might appear she knew perfectly well that it would be quite impossible. Neither her mother nor her grandfather would have permitted her to have a man friend. She had refused Toni as a husband, and she would certainly not be allowed to keep him as a friend. She had never had an intimate friend in her life until Maria had come upon the scene, and how disastrously that friendship had ended. Rina stole a little look at Toni. She saw for the first time how slight and delicate his features were, how thickly his hair grew, how bright his eyes were. She thought that a beard suited him, although it made him look older and more grave than most men of his age. It was thrilling to hear him say that he loved her and she felt for the moment as if she were

a person of immense importance. She wished that she could have loved him in return and made everything smooth and happy again. She sighed.

"You know I am going to England almost at once to stay with my aunt," she said presently. "That has met with a good deal of opposition, too, but mother has won the point. My grandfather is so angry still he refuses to speak to me, but he makes mother very uncomfortable and unhappy and she thinks if I go away for a time he will forget a little. He says I am a disgrace—" She caught her breath, and Toni fancied she had stifled a sob. He was genuinely distressed.

"I can never forgive myself," he said. "I have been the cause of great unhappiness to you."

"Oh, you mustn't say that. You've been everything that's kind," said Rina.

"And now you are going into exile?"

"Mother has always wanted me to see England because, you know, half of me belongs to it. I am to travel with Mrs. Proctor because mother can't leave—she thinks it's her duty to stay here, but I should look forward to it much more if she could come with me."

"Oh, you'll like England," he said reassuringly. "You'll meet lots of interesting people. It is a great country."

He pictured her there in one of those great gray stone country houses such as he himself had visited in years gone by—an ancient pile set in the midst of a superbly wooded park with deer and cattle in the open grassy spaces. He could picture her, too, in the setting of a wonderful English garden with level green lawns and branching cedars, and flowers of brilliant blossoming. And with her corn-colored hair and white skin she seemed to be truly an English girl, though her dark eyes belonged to the South.

There was something typically English in her gallant, graceful bearing.

"In England," he went on, "you will be much more free. The girls there have greater liberty. It will be a change for you."

"Yes, but I shall have to come back to the iron bars," said Rina laughing, but there was a little bitterness in her laughter.

"There is safety in them, though," said Conte Delfini. "But perhaps you will not come back here —to live. Other men besides myself will wish to marry you. You are very beautiful and you are very good. I knew you were a good Catholic." His eyes rested once more upon her face. "I hope your husband, whoever he may be, English or Italian, may prove worthy of you and of the love which I know you will give him."

Rina sat there listening to his words. He seemed to be painting the future for her in glowing colors. How could she ever have thought him dull.

"My grandfather would never hear of my marrying an Englishman," she said.

Antonio smiled. Prince Ubinaldi's influence seemed to be on the wane; at any rate he had been powerless to prevent this determined bid for freedom that was now being contemplated by Rina and her mother.

Helen, wondering a little that Toni's few words should have taken so long to say, now quietly reentered the room. She was a little astonished to see them sitting one on each side of the fireplace, deep in a perfectly amicable conversation. She was quickly aware that her own coming was an interruption, perhaps an unwelcome one. It even occurred to her that perhaps Rina had changed her mind, but this idea was really too fantastic to be entertained seriously.

They both rose as she came into the room, and in the glare of the electric light she saw that Rina's face was flushed and excited.

"I have stayed a long time, I am afraid," said Antonio; "I have been hearing about the intended journey to England."

"Don't you think it a good plan?" said Helen, who saw that he was determined, in spite of his disappointment, to behave sensibly.

"A very good plan. I feel almost envious—it's so long since I was there. I have been picturing Donna Rina in my thoughts in an English garden in June!"

"She will miss the Italian sunshine," said the Marchesa, looking at her daughter with a wistful tenderness, as if the coming parting was already beginning to hurt her.

"But the delicate gray English skies are so soft and your grass is delicious. The most wonderful grass in the world."

"It ought to be green with so much rain," said Helen laughing.

"I should like to have seen Donna Rina in England," he said.

He stooped and kissed Helen's hand, then he shook hands gravely with Rina. His departure seemed to them both a little abrupt; it was a painful moment for them all. Whatever she had done, Rina had at least turned her back upon a fate that promised comfort, security, and an adoring love. Whether she had made a mistake or not time would reveal. Helen hoped that she would not live to regret the decision so quickly and so irrevocably made.

When he had left them there was a little pause.

"Well, Rina, dear?" said Helen at last.

"How nice he is," said the girl softly. "So much nicer than I thought. I'm so glad that I saw him. I never liked him so much before. He is far nicer than Maria."

"So you have found that out at last?" said her mother smiling.

"Why? Did you know it?" asked Rina in surprise.

"I always suspected it," said Helen, "but then you know I never shared your great admiration for Maria."

"He was really quite a dear," said Rina, "he said perhaps I should marry while I am in England. Do you think it is at all likely that any one else will want to marry me?"

"You would not be married while you are there under any circumstances. You would have to be married from this house," said Helen.

"But should you like me to marry an Englishman?" asked Rina a little persistently.

"I have never thought about it. But I am afraid your grandfather would not be likely to approve of such a thing."

"I'd rather know what you think," said Rina.

"I want your husband to be a good man and a good Catholic—someone you can love," said Helen quietly.

And it was just such a man as that that Rina had sent out of her life, perhaps forever. Something of this same thought was evidently in the girl's mind, for she said impulsively:

"I wish I could have cared for Toni. Then every one would have been pleased. For he is a good man and a good Catholic."

She kissed her mother hastily and went out of the room.

CHAPTER VII

ALMOST as far back as she could remember any one Rina could remember the friend of her mother's youth, Mrs. Proctor. She came to Florence almost every spring, sometimes spending a few weeks there, but more often taking it, as she would say, on her way home, to have a look at Helen as she passed through.

As girls they had been at the same school, and although Mrs. Proctor was several years older they had been and still remained fast friends. She was a widow with one son, Markham, who never accompanied her upon her spring wanderings.

She arrived in Florence about a fortnight after the dismissal of Conte Delfini, and although Helen felt that March was rather a cold and wintry month for Rina's first visit to England she decided that it would be better to avail themselves of this exceedingly competent escort and arrange for the girl's departure.

Besides, Rina's relations with her grandfather continued to be extremely strained and he would hardly speak to her, so for this reason also it seemed desirable that the journey should be made as soon as possible. The old prince was additionally infuriated when he discovered that the final answer had been given to Delfini without reference to himself and while he was still hoping that Rina would come to her senses. And Delfini had accepted his dismissal as final and had left Florence. It was rumored that he intended to remain in the country until the following autumn.

Pasquale was therefore debarred from further action, and the intention of putting pressure upon Rina became all at once futile and useless. He was now so angry with her that when he was told of her

intended departure with Mrs. Proctor he made no objection at all.

Mrs. Proctor was an energetic, active woman, bronzed and weatherbeaten from the exposure of her complexion to all seasons and a diversity of climates, hot and cold, wet and dry. She was tall and angular with a handsome irregular face and abundant iron-gray hair. She was a great traveler, having been seized with a violently restless spirit after her husband's death. Till then she had led a comparatively quiet life at Stones, his old family place on the Cotswold hills. People were not slow to affirm that she neglected her boy as well as the property during those prolonged absences. Those were the days when traveling was cheap and easy, and she had visited India and Ceylon, the Holy Land and Egypt, Japan, Tunis, Algeria, Constantinople, New York, and Petrograd. Now, having done these things, she preferred to spend the winter months in some quiet corner of southern Italy, where she could find tranquillity and warm sunshine. She was an authority on hotels, food, trains, and routes, and would have been a competent manager at Cook's had she needed to work for her living. She used to say that she had stayed in all the principal hotels of Europe, Asia, and America. She had a bracing, vigorous personality, and her really deep affection for Helen was characterized by a faint spice of scorn that she should so meekly have permitted herself to remain immured in the Ubinaldi palace for upward of twenty years.

She was sitting talking to Helen at the close of a chill March day—a day of icy tramontana and sparse flakes of snow whirling along the Lung' Arno. There had been wild weather of late, and the Arno had risen and flooded the country and the lower parts of the town.

"Of course it's high time Rina went to England," said Mrs. Proctor, accepting her second cup of tea from Helen's hands. "You ought to have taken her there yourself years ago. It's absurd not to know your own relations, and after all the girl is half English."

"You know we don't think so much about traveling here," said Helen, in mild self-defense. "And Rina has been busy with lessons and classes. But I want her to go to England now if you don't mind letting her travel with you, Janet, and I think I had better tell you why."

She then gave her friend a brief outline of the succession of events which had led to the recent domestic crisis and which rendered it so necessary that Rina should absent herself from the Ubinaldi palace for a time.

Mrs. Proctor listened with that interested attention which women old and young and all the world over commonly lend to a love affair.

"Well, my dear Helen, I think from all you tell me it's a great pity Rina wouldn't have him. Why couldn't they have waited a little? Girls often change their minds."

"I am sure Rina wouldn't have changed her mind. She is so very decided," said Helen. "I want you to see her, Janet; she's really looking very pretty now, much prettier than when you saw her three years ago."

At that moment Rina entered the room and, going up to Mrs. Proctor, she made a little courtesy, foreign fashion, before she bent down to receive the embrace which that lady immediately bestowed upon her.

"Well, my dear Rina, I'm delighted to think you are coming home with me," she said subjecting the girl to an almost disconcerting scrutiny. Helen was

quite right; her daughter was very pretty and Janet felt a lurking unexpressed sympathy for the young man who had so recently received his dismissal.

"It's very kind of you to let me come with you," said Rina, "I hope I shan't be a great trouble to you."

"Oh, I shan't let you be a trouble to me," said Mrs. Proctor pleasantly, "I'm too old a hand to allow my fellow-travelers to annoy me. I hope if you've any time to spare while you are in England that you will come down to Stones and pay me a visit."

"I should love that," said Rina, softly.

"Your mother was there once; she can tell you about it," said Mrs. Proctor, who in theory was extremely attached to her home and more than a little proud of it.

Helen looked up quietly and said:

"Yes, I should like Rina to see Stones. She is to go first to Theresa at Queen's Barn, and they will be going to town in the beginning of May, so she will see a little of the London season. And after that I am sure it could be arranged."

"Markham is in London," said Mrs. Proctor rather abruptly; "he has been living there all the winter—all the time I have been away. Stones has been practically shut up."

"I thought he was so fond of it," said Helen in surprise.

"So he used to be. But since he has had this absurd craze for studying painting he prefers to live in Chelsea. I hope it is only a passing thing, for really he ought to live at home and look after his own property."

It was evident to Helen that she disapproved of this new phase of her son's, for she spoke of it with a hint of displeasure and also with some anxiety.

She added after a little pause:

"I daresay it is partly my own fault—he must have found it dull living in the country alone."

She said no more on the subject of Markham, but the conversation left an impression upon Helen as revealing an acute maternal anxiety arising from some well-defined but unexplained cause. It made her wonder a little, for hitherto Mrs. Proctor had always extolled Markham as a most excellent son who had never given her an hour's anxiety.

When Rina had gone out of the room leaving the two friends together, Mrs. Proctor said:

"Why, she's quite a beauty, Helen. I'm not surprised Conte Delfini fell in love with her. She never promised to be as pretty as all that."

It came into her mind that she would like to have this handsome girl under her care, and she hoped that she would be able to persuade her to pay her a long visit while she was in England. She was glad to think that Helen had given her consent to the proposal so readily. It might make a great difference in many ways if Rina were to spend some time at Stones.

Mrs. Proctor caught cold and was laid up for a week at the hotel, and during that time Helen and Rina visited her frequently and took her flowers and books. The illness, however, delayed their departure until nearly the end of March, a respite for which Helen was secretly thankful. She dreaded losing her daughter for those few months, and she was wise enough to see that after so novel an experience it could never be the same Rina who returned to her. It would be a changed and a far more independent Rina, accustomed to decide many things for herself and to rely upon herself, too, for many things. She was glad, therefore, that the little delay had occurred, and they saw more of each

other than they had done since Maria Binaldi had stepped in to claim so much of Rina's leisure. Helen was almost relieved to find that that friendship had come to an end. It had never been in her eyes a very wise or prudent one.

When the day did actually arrive Rina felt the parting almost more than Helen did. Her courage very nearly failed her, and she wept and begged that she might be allowed to remain in Florence. This unexpected breakdown braced Helen to a determined attitude. And that same afternoon she drove to the station and saw her daughter depart for Milan en route for England under the capable and competent aegis of Janet Proctor. She never had the slightest misgiving as to the wisdom of the step, least of all could she foresee the least imprudence in entrusting Rina to the care of her old friend.

As the journey progressed and Mrs. Proctor became more and more aware of the beauty, charm, and unselfishness of Rina, her determination to have her at Stones as soon as possible became more fixed, and she felt impatient at the thought of the delay in carrying out this plan should Rina go to her aunt's house in the first instance.

Mrs. Proctor was only very slightly acquainted with Lady Ellington, who was a good deal older than Helen and had been married in the days of that school-friendship. She had, therefore, the less compunction about changing the plans which had been formed for Rina. She overruled Helen's mildly expressed wishes and upon her arrival in Paris, where they spent a few days she wrote to Lady Ellington, with Rina's knowledge although not with her approval, and announced her intention of taking her down to Stones for a few days when they first reached England.

Rina was not at all easy in her mind about this

arbitrary change of plans. She would have been glad to ask her mother's permission, and to make sure that she approved of it. Such a course, however, was impossible, and Mrs. Proctor had a way of arranging things in a high-handed manner which left but little opportunity for remonstrance or discussion. She argued that Helen had placed Rina under her care, and if she chose to modify the plans already made she was at perfect liberty to do so.

She had, however, her own private reasons for taking Rina immediately to Stones and these were chiefly centered round the person of her son. Markham Proctor was a handsome, unsatisfactory creature whom she had spoiled and indulged as only a young widow can spoil and indulge her only child. And until the last year or two he had given her no trouble at all. It was a new development, this dislike of Stones, this refusal to live there permanently. Mrs. Proctor did not indeed wish to insist that he should live there during the winter when she was herself absent, though she was not sure that it was not his duty to do so. But she did not unreasonably desire that as an entirely idle man with no other ties he should remain at Stones while she was in residence there. There was a good deal of land which required looking after; the house was far too beautiful to be shut up in this way for more than half the year, and there was the Mission, which naturally suffered from the neglectful absence of Markham. Father Lawrence, who had been in charge of the mission for many years, had remonstrated with Markham and had remonstrated in vain. In spite of all his efforts there was no longer that united little Catholic colony at Stones that there had been in the lifetime of Markham's father.

Rina was somewhat reassured when she saw that Mrs. Proctor took it quite for granted that her

mother could have no kind of objection to this change of plans. She felt that she could hardly refuse to go to Stones, as she was under an obligation to her for permitting her to travel to England in her company. They did not stay in London on their arrival, but proceeded immediately to Gloucestershire, arriving at Stones about eight o'clock on a dark March night.

Rina was tired; the crossing had been rough and she had never before been on the sea. She was a bad sailor and the steamer had been late in arriving. The journey to London was a blurred, unpleasant impression; she seemed still to feel the rocking of the boat. She felt strange and cold when she descended from the motor and entered the large well-lighted hall that was her first glimpse of an English country house. She saw a red glowing fire before which an ancient collie was stretched in slumber when the door opened, though he lost no time in dragging his stiff limbs toward the door to welcome Mrs. Proctor.

"Is Mr. Markham in?" she heard Mrs. Proctor say to the footman.

"No, ma'am; he went down to the village after tea and he's not back yet."

"We'll go straight upstairs," said Mrs. Proctor to Rina. "We shall dine in about half an hour." She spoke in an absent-minded, rather pre-occupied manner, and Rina felt suddenly that she had become almost like a stranger. All through the journey she had proved herself a kind, energetic and capable traveling companion, but here in her own house she seemed changed and different. Rina found herself with a little, nervous fear of the unknown Markham. Perhaps he would resent her presence—he might wish to have his mother to himself after their long separation. They would want to speak of private

matters to each other, and she would feel in the way. She began to wish that she had gone, as had been originally arranged, straight to her aunt's house in Hampshire.

She had been weak to yield so easily to the change of plans, but on looking back she was obliged to acknowledge that her opinion had hardly been asked. Mrs. Proctor had settled everything and had hardly consulted her at all. She had been swept resistlessly into the current of those decisive arrangements, and had felt that to demur even a little would have been churlish under the circumstances. It was only now that the plans had been carried out to their logical conclusion that Rina began to feel herself like a helpless pawn suddenly thrust into surroundings that made her feel timid and unhappy. It was the strangeness of it all that bewildered and perplexed her.

She went up to her room. It was a very large apartment with three great windows now closely curtained and shuttered. The prevailing tint was a warm dark red, but the chintz-covered chairs and couch lent a touch of lightness to the whole. A big fire blazed on the hearth—a fire of glowing coals with a log of wood crackling on the top. Rina had certainly never seen such a fire before in her life, and its warm glow comforted her both physically and mentally. The bed was also hung with curtains and a screen was placed before the door as if to avert any lurking draught. A housemaid was already unpacking her trunks and arranging her clothes. Rina felt nervous and excited.

When she had dressed in a gown of pale mastic-colored charmeuse, cut slightly open at the throat and with long sleeves, she went downstairs wondering where she should go in this great house. But a footman who seemed to be waiting for her in the

hall conducted her immediately to a large drawing-room. Although there was a fire, it had the bleak and chilly feeling of a room that had long been unoccupied. She discovered that she was not alone. Standing in front of the fire at the other end of the room there was a young man. Something that was easy and graceful in his attitude arrested Rina's attention. He was good-looking, too, with crisp, chestnut-colored hair that grew very thickly, and bright, rather bold blue eyes. He was rather too pale, having the complexion that so often accompanies hair of a reddish quality; his nose was too long and perhaps too sharp, but the general effect was decidedly pleasing, and the smile with which he greeted Rina was charming and set her at once at her ease.

"I hope you're not too cold," he said, advancing toward her and extending his hand, "for if you are you will certainly never get warmer in here. It's like an ice-house, and we should have been far better off in the library, as I told my mother. But you have been traveling with her for nearly a week, haven't you? So you must certainly have discovered how greatly she prefers her own way to other people's."

He smiled again, this time with the effect of taking Rina into his confidence.

"She arranged everything," said Rina, "even about my coming here. But she made the plans and I fell in with them. It didn't occur to me to have a way of my own."

His garrulousness had destroyed that oppressive timidity which had taken possession of her upon her arrival.

"Ah, you were wise," he said, "wiser than you knew. Now I have a way and it's generally in collision with hers. You wait and see. Everything will be quite calm for a few days and then I shall go

mad—this place always sends me mad—and then I shall tell her I must go back to town!" He threw up his hands. "And it's no idle threat—I do go back. Dear mamma doesn't realize my real feelings toward Stones. Have you ever been in Gloucestershire before?"

"No, never. This is the first time I've been in England."

"Do you always live abroad?" he asked.

"Yes, my home's in Florence."

He gazed at her in admiration.

"Wonderful! In an ancient *palazzo* brown with years, festooned with wistaria in spring?"

"Yes," assented Rina.

"You look like it," he assured her; "you seem to have stepped out of one of those delicious Renaissance portraits—golden hair and dark eyes and long neck and slender hands, and all!"

Rina laughed.

"Why do you laugh? I am perfectly serious. By the way, Donna Rina, have you any idea why mamma brought you here like this?"

"None at all. I was to have gone to my aunt's. That was the plan she changed. I ought to be at Queen's Barn at this moment."

"How capricious she is," he said frowning, "still, for once she has shown a strange acumen. Do you like Italy—if I may ask so banal a question?"

"Yes, I suppose so—I never thought about it much."

"I only like it in the spring," said Markham. "In winter you are frozen—in summer you are roasted. The North Pole and the tropics. I shall come next spring to paint your old palazzo, with the *Arno with its tawny troubled gold* flowing past it."

"Are you an artist?" inquired Rina. There was something about Markham that quickly aroused

people's interest; he was so gay, so spontaneous and had a charm he seldom forgot to show—especially to strangers—to young and beautiful strangers, the reason of whose presence at Stones was still wrapped in mystery.

"Mamma says that I daub. But really she's not impartial. You see, she hates it so. She declares that it comes between us!"

At that moment the door opened and Mrs. Proctor, handsomely clad in black silk, rustled into the room.

"I see you are already talking nonsense to Donna Rina," she said, going up to Markham.

Although he was tall her eyes were almost on a level with his.

"On the contrary, I was being very witty and amusing. Wasn't I?" he appealed to Rina. "Do say I was! Mamma is so hard on me."

"I wish you would not speak of me as mamma. You cannot imagine how absurd it sounds."

"But I like being absurd. Every one is so terribly sensible in these days—they have no time to think about being funny. I hope Donna Rina will like me in spite of all my little failings, which I am sure you have been careful to point out to her."

"You conceited creature—we did not discuss you at all," said Mrs. Proctor, smiling at her son in a proud, fond way. She turned to Rina: "You see what a goose I have for a son. If I had really told you what he was like I am sure you would never have come here. I despair of his ever becoming a strong, sensible, reliable man."

"I shall make such progress if Donna Rina will only help me," he said.

Rina laughed in spite of herself. He was so different from any one she had ever seen that she could not help feeling interested and attracted.

Behind all his surface folly she felt convinced that he was a clever, intelligent man. He made her feel far more at home than his mother did.

"You must remember that this is her first visit to England. Do not please give her the impression that all Englishmen are raving lunatics," said Mrs. Proctor, with mock severity.

They went in to dinner, and when they were sitting at table Markham turned to Rina and said:

"If you are going to write a book about your impressions you must not forget to describe mamma and me. We are quite typical of an English mother and son. We fall out half a dozen times a day and when she is very unkind to me I pack up my things and go back to Chelsea and forget myself in hard work."

"My dear Rina, he never did a stroke of work in his life. And whatever you do don't let him attempt to paint your portrait—he'll make you all green and yellow."

"Mamma of course guessed that I should want to paint your hair. And of course you must wear a green dress—not that buff one. Are you partial to buff like Maggie Tulliver's dreadful aunt?"

"Nonsense, Markham, it isn't buff," said his mother laughing. "It is champagne—mastic—biscuit—whatever you like, but not buff."

"Champagne? How delicious!" said Markham, putting his head on one side and gazing at Rina. "Still, green is your color. Not a bright, strong shade, but a soft sea-ish green." He screwed up his eyes as if he were contemplating a mental vision of Rina thus attired. "I shall certainly begin tomorrow. Mamma, you mustn't let Donna Rina go away until it's quite, *quite* finished." He clasped his long fine hands in pretended ecstasy.

"It entirely depends upon Lady Ellington," said

Mrs. Proctor, inwardly delighted at the success of her little intrigue.

"You must tell her that you are ill," said Markham, "and then that you are still too weak to travel. You could spread that out over a fortnight, couldn't you?"

"But I'm not ill," said Rina.

"You were ill on the boat—mamma told me so!" said Markham triumphantly. He began to wish he had always had a sister to "rag" as he was ragging this statuesque young creature who was so obviously enjoying his nonsense.

"Oh, that doesn't count," said Rina.

"Of course it counts, everything counts," said Markham. "I never heard any one say that seasickness didn't count before. People have died of it!"

"I'm quite well now in any case," said Rina.

"There—she doesn't want excuses to stay. Never mind—I'll write to your aunt and tell her that you are having your portrait painted for next year's Academy."

Rina began to feel unreal. The atmosphere was so novel to her and so different from the quiet, sedate and rather austere atmosphere of the old Ubinaldi palace that she wanted to pinch herself in order to discover that she was really there and not dreaming.

Little more than three weeks ago she had been sitting talking to Toni in her mother's salotto—talking, too, about this very visit to England—and now all that part of her life had been left for the moment utterly behind. It was even beginning to grow dim by contrast with the strange novelty of her new position. She glanced round the room. The subdued and almost concealed electric light illuminated obscurely the fine oak paneled walls hung with the

dark family portraits of which only the faces and here and there the pale folds of a dress detached themselves with any distinctness. There was a certain polished quality in the surroundings reflected from the dark paneling and the fine lustrous silver that broke at intervals the white damask of the tablecloth. In just such a room as this, opulent, dignified, undisturbed, one could conjure up past visions of revelry presided over by the pale, glimmering faces that watched still from the walls. Markham and his mother were both too modern for the room, but if Rina had only been aware of the fact, her young beauty seemed to challenge the past charm of those pictured faces as if defying them to show her a greater measure of loveliness than her own.

After dinner they returned to the drawing-room. Coffee was brought in, and both Mrs. Proctor and her son smoked cigarettes till it was bedtime. Then they said good night to Markham, and as they left the room Mrs. Proctor asked Rina in a low tone if she would like to go into the chapel. She assented, and they went down a long and wide passage, bleak and chilly and dimly illuminated by electric light in unusual iron lanterns. At the farther end of this passage a short flight of stone steps led down to the chapel door. It was built on to the eastern wing of the house, and in addition to this private entrance had a public door that led from a short covered way to the road.

Mrs. Proctor paused at the door, took down some lace veils from a peg and handing one to Rina adjusted another upon her own abundant gray hair. Whether it was the effect of this headdress or of the subdued light, her handsome face wore a curiously softened aspect as she stood there in momentary hesitation.

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"There will be Mass at eight o'clock to-morrow," she said. "Will that be too early for you, Rina?"

"Oh, no; I'm used to going at eight," said Rina, relieved to find that she would be able to go to Mass so easily during her stay at Stones.

In silence they entered the chapel. It was not large, but it was very beautiful, even richly decorated. The lamp that hung before the tabernacle was an antique one of massive silver, and it was suspended from the low oak ceiling by heavy silver chains. Above the altar was a faithful copy of Fra Angelico's "Annunciation," and on the walls were copies of Tuscan saints—details from larger pictures and frescoes. Their faint gold backgrounds glimmered with a subdued radiance in the rich gloom.

"That is all Markham's work," whispered Mrs. Proctor; "he spent a whole summer in Florence and worked all day. You were away for your *villeggiatura* at the time."

She looked almost wistfully at the pictures as if they belonged to a dear, regretted epoch, which indeed they did. Then she knelt down upon a velvet prie-dieu and Rina knelt on another at her side.

Rina said her night prayers then just as she had always been accustomed to say them in the old chapel at home, and it was at once a relief and a pain to feel this link with the life she had left behind her. The pain accentuated that sense of nostalgia that had been slowly possessing her ever since her arrival at Stones. In a sense, this feeling was diminished by the spiritual link that asserted itself now as she knelt by Mrs. Proctor's side, and she seemed to envisage Stones from a new aspect—the aspect of an old Catholic house with many tragic memories and traditions that made it a proud and perhaps also a precious heritage.

And Markham, in spite of all the gay flippancy of his manner, must care passionately for those traditions and that heritage since he had been able to paint with such delicate faithfulness that picture which had been familiar to her from her earliest youth.

CHAPTER VIII

RINA came down on the following morning to find a typical English breakfast, a meal which she had never met with before. She had attended Mass in the chapel, and then had returned to her room to put a few finishing touches to her toilette, as it was still not quite nine o'clock, the hour at which Mrs. Proctor had told her breakfast would be ready.

Rina would have greatly preferred to have some coffee and toast in her room, but her mother had warned her this was not the custom in most English houses and that she would be expected to appear at breakfast.

Mrs. Proctor, looking rather stern and matutinal, was sitting behind a silver tea and coffee service, looking at her letters, of which quite a little pile were demanding her attention. She glanced up and smiled at Rina and said:

"Do go and see what's under those dishes—I haven't had time to look. Please help yourself."

Rina perceived a row of dishes on the sideboard. Below them burned little spirit-lamps. Various cold viands were also to be seen; a ham, a cold tongue, a formidable-looking pie.

"I think I'll have some toast," she said coming back to the table. She helped herself to toast and butter, and Mrs. Proctor handed her a large cup

of coffee in an absent-minded way, for her attention was still being absorbed by her correspondence.

Rina had only eaten a few mouthfuls when the door was thrown open and Markham pranced into the room. His light, slight, graceful figure seemed instinct with life and youth.

"Good morning, mamma! Good morning, Donna Rina! I've come down early this morning on purpose to talk to you. Mamma will tell you that I always make a point of being late in the morning. I am the despair of Father Laurence, whom you haven't yet been introduced to, I suppose?"

"No," said Rina, "but I saw him at Mass this morning."

"Good girl," he said approvingly. Then with a sharp glance at her plate. "What are you eating? Only toast? That will never do. I simply can't allow it. Just come and look here." He went to the sideboard and whisked the covers one by one from the dishes. "Kedgeree! Did you ever eat kedgeree? Eggs and bacon? Ham and tongue and pie? No? You disdain them all? Then have a cutlet—I always begin on a cutlet unless there is a grilled bone. But you must positively eat eggs and bacon—you can not be said to have known life in an English country house unless you have eaten poached eggs and bacon!"

He brought a plate with a poached egg and some bacon upon it and set it down with a flourish before Rina.

"You are to sit to me to-day, you know, and I can't have you looking hungry and yearning. That sort of thing is quite out of fashion, and we artists like rich, opulent-looking models—'sleek-headed men and such as sleep o'nights'—as Shakespeare says!"

Mrs. Proctor came to Rina's assistance.

"Don't let him tease you, Rina. And if you don't want that egg, please leave it. And Markham, I am not going to let you monopolize her all the morning—we are going into Great Hardwick in the motor."

"Oh, indeed you are not, mamma," said Markham in a tone of great decision. "I don't at all approve of your indulging in these joy-rides at your age. Scouring the country when you've only just come back after being abroad for months and months. You really musn't take Donna Rina away —I want to play with her myself!"

"It is quite useless your beginning a portrait," said Mrs. Proctor; "there will be no time to finish it. I've had a letter from Lady Ellington begging me to let her go there not later than Saturday."

"And to-day is Tuesday. That gives me four days. You've no idea what I can accomplish in four days. I shall work all day—on the first wave of a wonderful inspiration!"

"But I don't really care about my having my portrait painted," said Rina. "I had one done when I was a little girl. I remember I was terribly bored at having to sit still so long."

Markham threw up his hands with a gesture of despair.

"Listen to them both!" he said, casting his eyes up to the ceiling. "If I am snubbed like this I shall go back to town by the twelve o'clock train."

"But there really isn't time. And your portraits are so hideous," said Mrs. Proctor.

"That is because I have had such hideous models. But you will see what a lovely portrait I shall make of Donna Rina. I have already hunted up some wonderful silver-green draperies for you," he continued, turning to Rina.

He proceeded to devour cutlets with an apparently voracious appetite. His mother glanced at him indulgently. But she was not going to make things too easy for him; that would be a fatal mistake. He was already intensely curious as to her reason for bringing Rina down to Stones. She had never mentioned her in any of her letters until she wrote from Paris to say that Rina would accompany her home for a few days' visit.

Markham's breakfast was a very serious meal. Rina wondered whether he would dispense with the one o'clock luncheon. She ate the poached egg to please him, but she had finished long before he had. Mrs. Proctor, however, remained seated at the table and showed no inclination to move.

At last Markham rose.

"Will you come with me? I want to show you my studio. Mamma isn't to come. She's too discouraging this morning and I don't love her any more." He danced up to his mother and kissed her. She pushed him away laughing.

"Go away and don't be so foolish," she said. Then she turned to Rina, who stood there looking a little perplexed, not knowing what she ought to do.

"Go with him, my dear," said Mrs. Proctor.

The studio was a large, lofty room at the top of the house with a bleak northern outlook. The view from the windows, over some of the wildest and most desolate of Cotswold scenery, was fine and extensive, and stretched away almost to the Malvern Hills. Those bare unwooded heights spreading away to the horizon under a wonderful wide sky enchanted Rina, who stood there gazing at them. It had been too late and dark to see anything of the surrounding country last night, and from the train she had caught glimpses only of endless, chilly-

looking green fields with dark lines of hedges separating one from the other.

Markham left the room and presently returned with his arms full of some delicate old silver-green silk; he flung the drapery across a chair. It was the color Rina thought of the Tuscan olive trees on a day of east wind when they shiver in the sun.

The studio was rather sparsely furnished, and there was not much evidence of past work. There was an easel, and on a large table smeared with dabs of paint there reposed an assortment of brushes, palettes, and paints. With this paraphernalia Markham proceeded to occupy himself.

While he was doing this, Rina made a quick survey of the room. On another table some books and newspapers were lying in careless confusion. She went up to it and took up a book which attracted her by its rather arresting black and red cover, on which a chessboard was depicted. It bore the title of "The Chessboard."

Markham was still occupied in preparing a large canvas and scrutinizing some pieces of charcoal. He was not noticing Rina and she opened the book more from idleness than from curiosity to know more of its contents. She read a page or two, then a sentence struck her as if she had been dealt a blow; she put it down and almost guiltily turned away.

She hoped that Markham had not seen her reading the book.

"Are you ready?" he said, turning abruptly toward her. "Will you sit there, please? I am really in earnest, you know. I want to paint you most tremendously. You won't be unkind and say no, will you, Donna Rina?"

"I don't want to sit to you if Mrs. Proctor wishes me to drive with her," said Rina, still feeling perplexed.

"Oh, she won't mind. She loves pottering into Great Hardwick by herself and gossiping with every one she meets. I'm only afraid it may bore you too much."

"Oh, I'm sure it won't bore me," said Rina.

She sat down in the chair indicated by Markham. She bore the somewhat close and critical scrutiny he now bestowed upon her with no sign of embarrassment. She had rather the feeling that she was humoring a wilful and capricious child. People always excused and forgave Markham Proctor, partly because he was so good-looking and partly because he always appeared so irresponsible.

Rina was not giving him her full attention. She was still thinking of those words she had read in "The Chessboard." It troubled her to think that Markham should possess such a book; its presence there tallied so ill with the existence of the chapel and all that it so securely stood for. She could not bring the two things into line; the effort to do so bewildered and hurt her.

"I feel that I am going to fall in love with you," said Markham with perfect calmness, after a few minutes' silence, during which he had been contemplating Rina almost as if she were some beautiful thing without life or consciousness. "Mamma said that I shouldn't admire you, though she considered you very pretty. That shows how even one's nearest and dearest always misjudge one's taste."

"Please don't fall in love with me," said Rina earnestly. Her recent experience and all the agitation they had produced were too fresh in her memory, and they made her positively dread a repetition of anything of the kind.

"Why not?" said Markham, as if deeply interested in her point of view. "Don't you like it?"

She shook her head. "Not at all."

"Have you had so much experience of it, then? How delightful! You must tell me all about it. You are not engaged, I hope? It would break my heart to hear that you were engaged."

"No, I'm not engaged. I am here now—or rather in England—because I didn't want to be engaged or married."

"Now that's tremendously interesting," said Markham, opening his blue eyes very wide. "I take it then you've left some poor beggar most awfully miserable in Florence?"

"I hope he isn't so very miserable. He seemed quite sensible about it," said Rina.

"Quite sensible even when you refused him? Oh, that was all pretence, of course. I expect by this time he's drowned himself in the Arno from sheer despair."

Rina laughed.

"You are laughing," said Markham; "that is very unkind of you. I hope you will not laugh at me when the time comes for me to throw myself into the Windrush!"

"It won't come," said Rina with a joyous confidence. "You see, I'm going to my aunt's on Saturday. No one could fall in love between Tuesday and Saturday."

"I can fall in love at any moment," said Markham, beginning to jot down some cryptic signs with charcoal on the canvas. "I almost always fall in love at first sight; it is quite a habit of mine. I've quite time to fall in and out again by next Saturday. Why are you in such a hurry to go to your aunt's? Do you like her so much? What a question to ask! As if any one ever liked their aunts—they are an unlikable race!"

"I like Aunt Theresa very much, though I don't know her very well," said Rina.

"And cousins? Are there cousins?"

"Yes; there are two. Mary and Peregrine."

"*Peregrine!* Not really? You can't mean it!"

"Why not Peregrine?"

"Because no one was ever really called that."

"It is a family name. The eldest son is always called Peregrine."

"I think I shall like Mary best," he said, adding some rough charcoal hieroglyphics to those he had already perpetrated upon the canvas. "Where do they live?"

"Oh, a long way off in Hampshire."

"And you are going to be buried there for the rest of your stay in England? I tell you it's not to be done!"

"No; we are going to town early in May," said Rina.

"Then we shall certainly meet there. Where does Lady Ellington live when she's in London?"

"In Prince's Gate. You musn't ask me where it is, for I have never been there."

"Oh, every one knows where Prince's Gate is," he said cheerfully. "I shall come and see you when you are there. And please, may I see Peregrine, too, if I am very good? I promise not to touch him, but I do so want to look at him."

"If he's there and if you really do come, I suppose you will see him," said Rina. "But he isn't often in town—he likes the country best, Mary says."

"Then I suppose I must content myself with Mary," said Markham. "Now turn your head very slightly toward me, please. And you mustn't look haughty and annoyed. I want you to smile as if I were being very witty and amusing—a light-hearted fellow! I don't want you to look miserable as if you'd just sent some miserable and luck-

less wight to drown himself in the Arno. Do you know what a wight is, Donna Rina? It is in Keats, you know."

Now he was standing and making a succession of little airy dashes at the canvas, and it seemed to Rina that as fast as he made a mark upon it, he rubbed it out again with his finger. At this rate she felt the portrait would never be finished, even if he had had twice the time at his disposal. She moved a little impatiently, for she was tired of sitting so long in one position.

"Oh, but you musn't wriggle," said Markham. "If you were to have a wriggling expression, it would spoil my picture. I want people to say when they see it: 'That's the famous Florentine beauty, Donna Rina Ubinaldi. Don't you remember she was over here last year and took London by storm? And poor Markham Proctor, who painted it, was dreadfully in love with her—he's quite heartbroken, you know!' Can't you hear the dear old pussy-cats purring over it?"

He retreated a little, screwing up his eyes, then he advanced again with a kind of prancing movement and executed some further unintelligible signs.

"Sargent would give the world to be doing what I'm doing now," he declared. "Those hands of yours—those white, tapering hands you see in the old Italian portraits and you can hardly believe in them—you think the artist must have exaggerated their exquisite beauty! You belong to the Renaissance, Donna Rina—there ought to have been mysterious murders and stabbings in one of those queer little twisted streets of Oltr' Arno, all because of you!"

Rina found it unnecessary to talk; he had so much to say and he hardly ever waited for her to answer. This bright-faced English boy—for in spite of his

twenty-seven years he looked scarcely more—was a great constrast in every way to Toni Delfini with his quiet voice, his silences, his thin, melancholy countenance. Rina felt that Markham made her feel almost old. The bubbling, youthful nonsense flowing on like a stream, unchecked and heedless, attracted her in spite of herself. For her part she was quite content to sit there and listen, and the only thing that diminished her enjoyment was the little teasing train of thought set up in her mind by those words she had read in "The Chessboard." She wondered if she should ever find courage to ask Markham why he kept such a book in the house.

"Now you may have a little rest," he said at last, when he had been working diligently and almost silently for some time. "Walk about the room, please—quite naturally. That will help me enormously. That's right—your movements are very characteristic."

It was difficult to move at all naturally under the circumstances, and Rina would have been less than human had she not exaggerated that characteristic habit of tilting her head back—thereby adding a little to her height and to the arrogance of her mien.

She moved about the room trying to keep her eyes from the scarlet and black cover of "The Chessboard."

"Have you ever heard of Adrian Guise?" said Markham suddenly.

"No, never," said Rina.

"I'll tell him that—it'll take some of the conceit out of him. He thinks he's awfully well known in Italy."

"What does he do?" inquired Rina innocently.

"Do? Why he writes, of course," said Markham.

"Novels?"

"Sometimes, not always. He'll be awfully intrigued to hear that his fame hasn't reached Florence."

"Oh, you musn't judge by me, you know," said Rina smiling; "I am awfully ignorant about books. He is so celebrated—this friend of yours?"

"Well, I shouldn't say that exactly, but he's beginning to get pretty well known, judging by his sales. Mamma doesn't like him—she won't have him here."

Rina never quite knew why it should have been so, but she instantly and, as it were, intuitively connected this unknown author with the book that she had opened that morning.

She said:

"Just now I opened that book over there, 'The Chessboard.' Did your friend write it?"

Markham looked at her in a hard, defiant way; his gay, boyish expression had for the moment vanished.

"Well, and what if he did?" he said.

"How can he be a friend of yours? You are a Catholic," said Rina, and her tone was icy.

That look of hers—the tone of her voice—lashed him; he reddened under her calm scrutiny.

"Of course I am a Catholic," he said.

"Then you oughtn't to have such a book in the house. Oh, I did not read a whole page, yet I saw something against the Faith."

"I suppose you are very Black in your sympathies?" said Markham carelessly. "It's as a political machine that Adrian attacks the Church. But he is a Catholic himself—or rather he was once."

"I don't want to hear about him!" said Rina with sudden passion. "I think your mother is perfectly right not to have him here."

Markham looked very sulky.

"Of course, if you've been brought up abroad in that narrow, Black set you can't be expected to sympathize with a broad-minded liberal man like Adrian," he said.

"The people who write such things in Italy are not broad-minded and liberal. They are free-masons and are the avowed enemies of the Church," she said.

It was the first time that any one had remotely attacked the Church in her presence, and she was astonished at the fierce anger it evoked within her. For Markham was defending Adrian Guise, the writer of the book, the man who dared to laugh and mock at those things which to a Catholic should be sacred.

"He would admire you," said Markham, who was the first to recover his temper; "he is a great admirer of beauty. It's all the more strange because his own wife isn't pretty at all. She is very attractive and charming, all the same. Adrian is very much attached to her—very dependent upon her, really. I'd like you to see him—you wouldn't be so prejudiced then. He is my greatest friend. I'll show you a sketch of him I did once."

He went across the room and took out some drawings from a deep oak chest. Then he returned to her side by the window.

"There, what do you think of that?"

It was a chalk drawing, very roughly executed, but that roughness seemed rather to add to than detract from the power of the drawing. It represented the fine, lion-like head of a man of some forty-five years; one felt that he must be in real life immense of stature, almost gigantic in aspect. He had a thick sweep of hair brushed off his brow, and a beard that might be either fair or gray. It was a strong, rather coarsely modeled face, but even in

this careless presentment of him one felt the power of the man, dominating, unscrupulous, perhaps even sinister.

"You have not flattered him, have you?"

Rina's voice scarcely sounded like her own. She felt a strange emotion swelling in her throat; she could not define it. Those hard pictured eyes seemed to be watching her with a close and deadly scrutiny. It was almost as if a kind of rivalry had already sprung up between them.

"I know him too well for that," replied Markham; "he's very wonderful, don't you think? He's the kind of man that other men follow. Then he said with a touch of bitterness: "He might have been here now, if it hadn't been for my mother refusing to receive him and Adelaide. Have you ever noticed what tyrants women are when they're in the position of top-dog? She's got the money, you see. And if I'm not a good boy I shan't get my pocket-money."

"I don't think you ought to talk like that," said Rina warmly; "I don't, indeed. Your mother must have a very good reason——"

She stopped short. There was reason enough in the man's very physiognomy for such a prejudice as Mrs. Proctor revealed.

"Oh, I know she thinks he influences me—that's all rot," said Markham.

"I think she is quite right to be afraid of his influence. He may be a danger to your faith."

"My mother is a very good, pious woman. But she's awfully uncharitable about Guise."

Rina felt that her first sitting, which had been a very lengthy and protracted one, might now be brought to an end. She had learned a great deal about the Proctors in that time, and she was enabled to see quite clearly the reason for that profound

anxiety which Mrs. Proctor had displayed in Florence when speaking of her son's long absences from Stones. Rina felt, too, that she knew more perhaps than she had any right to know as a mere passing visitor. Markham had disclosed the reason for those deep differences which had arisen between himself and his mother.

"You must come again to-morrow. I've really hardly made a beginning," said Markham.

"Perhaps," said Rina.

CHAPTER IX

RINA was walking alone in the garden early that afternoon when she saw a figure in a black cassock walking slowly up and down the terrace, breviary in hand. She came upon him suddenly, for she had thought that particular walk was unoccupied. Markham and his mother were both busy with the agent in the study, and she had taken the opportunity of getting a little fresh air after her long sitting that morning.

The priest looked up, raised his hat and came toward her.

"Donna Rina," he said, "we ought to know each other. Mrs. Proctor told me that you were staying here and I saw you at Mass this morning. I am Father Laurence."

He was an oldish man, possibly between sixty and seventy years; his hair was very white; he was small and rather spare, and his voice was kindly and set Rina at once at her ease.

"What do you think of your first glimpse of England?" he said.

"I think it's beautiful," said Rina, "although I've

seen so little as yet. I feel as if I belonged to it, somehow. You know my mother is English, though this is my first visit to her country."

"I am glad, then, you have seen Stones," said the priest; "of course the mission is not what it used to be in the days of Markham's father. Then we had quite a little Catholic colony here—almost the whole village was occupied by Catholics, which is a thing you seldom find in England. The chapel hardly held us all on Sundays then, and Mr. Proctor used to talk of building a larger church to accommodate us all. But though it isn't what it used to be in those days I am glad you have seen this side of English life. It is not, alas, a national side nor typical of England, but it is something the nation could not well dispense with, and I sometimes wonder if it fully realizes the fact. We have had no storms of late by which to test our strength and the forces that are working in our midst for the glory of God."

"It was a relief to me to find I could go to Mass so easily this morning," said Rina. "In Florence there is always a church at one's elbow—I suppose one gets spoiled."

"I hope you will see something of our London churches before you go back. It will give you some idea of how the Church flourishes in our midst."

"I shall be there later on with my aunt—she is sure to take me there," said Rina.

"Is Markham making a long stay this time, do you know?" inquired Father Laurence.

"He didn't tell me. But won't he—now his mother's come back?"

"It doesn't follow by any manner of means. He's here one day and gone the next. We don't understand God's ways," he continued, "but from a human standpoint Mr. Proctor's death, fourteen years ago, was a great calamity for us and for Stones. His

wife in the first shock and grief of her loss became restless, and since then she has spent perhaps half the years traveling abroad. And what it meant to a wilful, high-spirited boy like Markham to be deprived of the wise guidance of such a father I cannot tell you."

His voice was sad. For thirty years and more he had ruled over the little mission at Stones; he had seen Markham in all his stages, had held him in his arms soon after he was born, and had baptized this greatly desired child. He knew something of the high hopes those devoted parents had cherished for this, their only son. The only other child, a girl, had died in infancy.

"We used to have quite a good choir, for with a large number of servants in the house one could always pick out a few good voices, and Mr. Proctor was very musical—he had the artistic temperament, which Markham has inherited—he trained the choir and played the organ himself. Now the house is nearly always empty, and for half the year it is only inhabited by the gardener and his wife."

"It's a pity Mr. Proctor doesn't care for it more," said Rina.

"He used to be very fond of it—he was never happy away from home at one time," said Father Laurence, "but he has ceased to like it. We must pray for him, Donna Rina," the old man's eyes sought hers rather wistfully. "We must pray that he may marry the right wife, and then he will come back to us heart and soul. That seems humanly speaking the one thing that can save him."

As Rina listened she was aware of some interior agitation that caused within her the same kind of emotion she had experienced that morning when she had been talking to Markham about Adrian Guise. She wondered whether the priest were aware of that

friendship, whether he knew about "The Chessboard," and of the actual peril to Markham's faith which association with its author must necessarily involve. It was not her business, as she told herself over and over again; she had no right to care so fiercely; she had no right to be anxious for Markham, a man whom she had seen yesterday for the first time. But there the curious little fact remains; she *did* care vitally that Markham should be rescued from that so imminent peril; she was anxious about him, and the anxiety seeemd to affect her in a personal way that she did not as yet understand.

"I will pray for him," said Rina softly, "I think he is under a bad influence now and he doesn't see it. But he must see it one of these days—he must, he must!" There was energy, emotion, in her voice.

"But the thing is to get him to see it," said the priest gravely.

"Do you know Mr. Guise?" she asked suddenly.

"I have never seen him. I know about him, of course," he answered.

"What sort of a man is he?"

"The most dangerous of all. He is a very clever, very fierce apostate—the kind of apostate that is never satisfied unless he can make disciples and spread his own poison. His life is spent in writing against the Church. We must remember that it's that kind of influence we have to contend against in Markham. It is a terrible thing to acknowledge when one thinks of the traditions here. This is one of the oldest Catholic houses in England, Donna Rina; it was confiscated during the Reformation; and Cromwell's soldiers, who did infinite harm all over Gloucestershire, were once encamped in the fields yonder. They found it hard and rocky, so they nicknamed the place Stones, and the name has stuck to it. Part of the house is modern and the

chapel dates from fifty years back, as the old one was burned down. But there was a martyred Proctor under Elizabeth, one of Markham's ancestors, and he has everything to make him a true and faithful son of the Church."

"Surely," she said, "these things must be stronger than any chance influence such as Mr. Guise's."

"Markham is passing through a dangerous stage. He has not strayed yet—he fulfils his duties and not much more. But he is straying. I am telling you all this because I think you ought to know. You will see perhaps a good deal of him while you are here, and if there is anything you can do—anything you can say—to help him while you are at Stones I am sure you will not leave it undone. He has a very sweet disposition, an appeal to his feelings rarely fails. Oh, he has so many good qualities that those who love him can only watch him now with an anguish of anxiety and fear."

"I will do all I can," said Rina, "but I am afraid it will be of no use. You see, I hardly know him—he is not likely to listen to me—a stranger.

She felt as if she had been flung into the very heart of a little drama that might indeed swiftly become a tragedy. And although she tried to feel indifferent and detached, assuring herself that the affairs at Stones did not concern her at all, she could not get away from the conviction that they did in some subtle, unexplained way concern her most vitally. Without the smallest conceit she could not but see that Markham admired her; he had spoken frankly of her beauty as if the fact must be taken for granted by all who saw her; she felt that he was attracted, that she had for him something of the attraction she had had for Toni Delfini. The two men could not be more unlike. They regarded life from an almost totally different point of view, and she knew that

despite Markham's charm (to which she had never from the first moment been insensible) the character of Toni was far more solid, far more in keeping with those ideals to which she had been rigorously educated.

"One never knows," said Father Laurence. He had had a long talk with Mrs. Proctor that morning and had learned from her something of that remote intention which had prompted her to bring Rina down to Stones. It seemed to him sometimes that Mrs. Proctor had too long minimized to herself the dangers of Adrian's influence. But now she had taken alarm, and she was resolved to leave no stone unturned by which Markham's rescue might be achieved. Father Laurence had warned her long ago of the danger of this friendship to a young man of Markham's impressionable type; and although she had refused to have the Guises in the house she had taken no steps whatever to prevent her son from seeing as much as he chose of them in London. His studio was quite close to their house, and the intimacy had been far greater than Mrs. Proctor or even Father Laurence had suspected. A year ago, during his mother's absence abroad, Markham had been laid up in town with a sharp attack of influenza and pleurisy, and it was at Mrs. Guise's suggestion that he had been enveloped in blankets and transported in a motor round to their house, where she herself had nursed him back to health. There had been ties of kindness over a long period, and Markham was the last person to rate them at too low a value.

"If he could only come home," said the priest, "and take up his life here and make the place one of the centers of Catholic activity in the county, just as it used to be in his father's lifetime! That is the wish all his true friends must have for him, and we

must pray that it may be fulfilled in God's good time."

He stopped and seemed to suggest tacitly to Rina that the interview had lasted long enough. Already through Markham she was in possession of most of the facts, and at least she would now be on her guard.

"I must go in now," said Rina, "Mrs. Proctor will be wondering where I am."

She went toward the house and Father Laurence continued his solitary pacing to and fro.

CHAPTER X

MARKHAM had begun to paint, and the portrait was rapidly evolving under the touch of his sure and practised hand. Rina inspired him as he had never been inspired before, and he was filled with the artist's joy in his own powers of creation. He was intensely happy, and felt that the days were the most satisfying he had ever spent at Stones.

As he painted he seemed to bring out all that was most definitely Italian in her face, the camellia whiteness of her skin, so smooth and unchanging in color, revealing so little of the emotion that a fair English skin is wont to do; the long dark eyes, with their bright softness as of hidden secret fires; the delicate features cut with that precise decision which is so characteristic of the Latin. Even in the picture the corn-colored hair seemed to possess something of that dusky quality which the fair English hair so seldom possesses. Yet it was the only definitely English thing about her. In England the girl looked astonishingly foreign and Italian.

Markham was so absorbed that he had ceased

to try to amuse her with frivolous conversation. He could tell by her face that she was not bored, although he had been painting in silence for nearly an hour. When he did speak, the words came so suddenly that they almost startled her, and she realized that their two minds had been employed perhaps in a deep contemplation of precisely the same subject.

"When you are in London I must contrive a meeting between you and Adrian and his wife."

She wondered if during that long silence he had been thinking of his friend, even while he studied her face and sought to reproduce it on the canvas.

"He won't know the Ellingtons probably," said Rina.

"I should say not indeed!" said Markham with a smile. "He goes to lots of houses but not where people are very strict and tiresome. You see he's awfully misjudged—by people of his own religion, I mean. We Catholics are a bigoted, intolerant lot!"

"But haven't we a right to be bigoted and intolerant where it is a question of a man having given up his faith?" she said with a touch of anger.

"I never said that he'd actually given it up, but his writings are considered dangerous. You see they're all on social subjects—politics, religion, and so forth. He's got a very original mind. Adrian's isn't an ordinary cleverness—he is a student, he thinks things out for himself. To hear my mother talk you'd think it was absolutely wicked to be clever and to have one's own ideas about things!"

"But it would be wicked for a man to let his cleverness become an occasion of sin," Rina began.

Markham held up his hands in mock dismay.

"Oh, my *dear* Donna Rina—don't, *don't!*" he supplicated.

She looked confused. "Why, what have I said?"

"Only the unnecessary, obvious thing. You should look at the other side. A man using his brains to help his fellow-creatures."

"Yes, but does he help them?"

"He wouldn't perhaps help a very rigid bigoted Catholic like yourself or my mother. You aren't the people who want help, or if you do you haven't yet realized your need. But the numbers of struggling, groping creatures at war with life, bewildered by its puzzles, confused by its problems—children stumbling in the darkness—he can and he does help those!"

His enthusiasm seemed to give eloquence to his words.

"But you," she said, "you are not stumbling in darkness."

"I like to know other points of view. I'm not narrow-minded. I believe if you were to see Adrian and his wife you would forget your prejudices."

"I don't think I want to see them. Probably they would think me very dull. I'm not at all of that—that *ambiente*."

"But don't you see," said Markham, laying down his brushes and leaning back in his chair with an indolently graceful pose, "that you would be something fresh and interesting to them? Adrian adores anything like a novelty. People take him so seriously now that he's getting on and making a heap of money. His wife's the only person who doesn't take him seriously—she's forever telling him that he is superficial, and that sometimes the language of the seminary still comes out. You can't think how that maddens him!"

"The seminary?" echoed Rina. A very terrible fear entered her heart, for the moment it was sharp

enough to make her feel sick with suspense. "He was never a priest, was he?"

"No, but he tried to be when he was very young. Only he hadn't a vocation. I don't know much about it—it isn't a part of his life that he cares to talk about now, though I suppose the knowledge must be useful."

Rina stood up.

"Mr. Proctor," she said, "I am going to say something that will perhaps offend you very much. I don't want ever to meet your Mr. Guise. And I think your mother is quite right not to have him here. It is a bad friendship—a bad influence for you. You must be aware of this. You have been brought up to something very different!" Her eyes shone, and Markham was not so annoyed but that he could see she looked superb under this impulse of anger.

"I'm not a fool or a baby," he said sullenly, "I know what I'm about. They are my friends—they have been extremely kind to me. I want to repay some of that kindness by having them here, but my mother won't hear of it."

There was a long silence. Rina sat down again, half ashamed of her little outburst.

"And his wife? Does he help her?" she asked at last.

Markham paused for a moment.

"Mrs. Guise isn't a person who wants help—she isn't one of the weak strugglers. Nothing bewilders or confuses her—she is very calm. And then she is not a Catholic—Adrian hasn't got to face that complication in his domestic circle. She is a very advanced woman. I don't mean a suffragette—though incidentally she is one—but a really advanced woman with democratic revolutionary ideas; she thinks herself on a level with men both mentally and physically."

"Does she write, too?" asked Rina.

"She speaks," said Markham, "she has a wonderful gift for that, and a voice that in an actress one would call golden. She has a great influence over Adrian. Without her he would never have dared to go so far as he has gone."

Rina felt as if they were discussing the phantom figures of another planet. This Adrian Guise and his wife seemed to have no relation to reality; she could not picture them.

"You don't seem to realize," she said, "the danger of their influence."

"I'm not such a weak idiot as you seem to think me," said Markham, "we are proud of being an old Catholic family—I have had that dinned into my ears all my life. We have never given up our faith even in the face of the most cruel persecutions. It isn't likely that I shall be the one to give it up. I'm the last of our branch of the family. I owe something to those who've gone before me, as well as to those who may possibly come after me; and I am not likely to forget those who fought and suffered and died for the Faith, in order, perhaps, that I might have it to-day!"

His eyes were bright with a kind of fierce fervor. She had a glimpse then of the real Markham who had never tarnished the shield of his faith with that sinister intimacy with the Guises. She saw, although she did not know it, the Markham that might have been, the child of so many prayers.

As he spoke a subtle change came over his face; it became serious and grave; he seemed to be speaking less to her than to himself. She saw at that moment past the frivolous exterior of the careless youth to the very heart of the man's gravity, his assured convictions, the bed-rock of principle founded solidly upon Catholic precept and dogma.

In that moment, too, she beheld in him a remote likeness to Toni. Both men were *au fond* guided by the same spiritual ideal, although in everything else no two lives could have been more different, more apart, more sundered. And she acknowledged to herself that these things were more attractive in Markham than they had been in Toni. His was the passionate fervor of youth, not the calm, settled acceptance of middle age. In him they were touched with the imagination, the poetry, of the artist. His faith was a heritage that had come down to him through suffering, through loss; it was precious because of those things. And yet how he could be so blind as thus deliberately to tamper with it—to expose it to nefarious influences, and to seek those very paths where dangers lay? But he was so far only straying as Father Laurence had said; he had not yet strayed.

But Rina, with a woman's swift illumination when once her heart is even remotely touched, saw that Adrian's influence was trying to detach Markham from his mother, who had already recognized and apprehended the spiritual peril with which he was threatened.

"When you see the Guises you will understand," said Markham.

"After what you have told me of them I don't think I want to see them."

To see them would only mean to satisfy a certain unwholesome curiosity that she was aware of and would fain conquer.

Markham smiled, one of his brilliant bewitching smiles.

"I want you to know my friend," he said simply.

Their eyes met. It was a deep, mutual, almost communicative gaze, and something seemed to stir and quicken in Rina's heart as if his look had called some deep emotion from its sleep—an emotion that

had perhaps all her life been awaiting his touch and the moment that held it. In that instant she began to feel not only the possibility that Markham might love her, but also that far more agitating and perplexing one, that she might in her turn learn to love him.

Her hands trembled as they lay in her lap; she could only hope that he would not observe their quivering. She sat very still, as if only in complete tranquillity she could achieve perfect self-control. Markham, aware of something embarrassing in the silence that had fallen upon them, took up his brushes and began to paint vigorously. For the next half hour neither of them spoke.

CHAPTER XI

"Do not let Markham tire you," said Mrs. Proctor, coming into the room.

Her conscience was not quite at ease about permitting Rina to spend such long mornings alone in her son's company. Between breakfast and luncheon she hardly saw either of them, and she did not want the girl to feel that she was neglecting her, or to suspect that she had some ulterior purpose in throwing her and Markham so constantly together.

Rina rose a little stiffly; she was glad of the interruption; it seemed to break the tension that had descended upon them after Markham's last words.

"I'm stiff—I have been sitting still for such ages," she said smiling.

Mrs. Proctor approached the easel, but Markham snatched away the canvas and set it with its face to the wall.

"No, really, mamma, I couldn't really let you!

You must wait till it's *quite* finished." He clasped his hands imploringly and put his head on one side with an air of mock entreaty that made her laugh.

"You see what an irresponsible baby I have for a son, Rina," she observed. "But I'm only convinced that he's made you such an appalling fright he doesn't dare show it to me."

"If Donna Rina thinks it's a fright when it is finished I shall burn it," said Markham resolutely.

"She will be too polite to tell you what she thinks," said Mrs. Proctor. "Rina, I have just heard from Lady Ellington. She won't let me keep you longer than Saturday—I am so sorry."

She had written asking if Rina might remain a few days longer at Stones, although she had purposely not mentioned the portrait.

Markham's face fell when he heard this decision; he turned abruptly away. But Rina accepted it with the tranquillity of the person who is accustomed to arbitrary decisions. She had, so to speak, been brought up on them.

"I am sorry, too," she said simply, "I have enjoyed being here, but if my aunt wants me—"

She stopped short, fearing to say too much. She was secretly strengthened by the thought that perhaps Markham would really come to see her in London. This was not to be the end of their quick, sudden friendship. This thought gave her an immense sustaining happiness across something that seemed for the moment almost to resemble pain. The separation would be a short one.

Markham recovered himself.

"Oh, mamma, you *must* telegraph and say she can't go the day after to-morrow. Why, it gives me no time at all. You must say that she's having her portrait painted and she simply must stay!"

"My dear boy, I don't dare treat Lady Elling-

ton like that. I hardly know her and I think she's a little vexed already at being robbed of her guest. We must be thankful Rina has been able to give us so much of her time."

"Oh, well, I shall go back to town, then. I've got lots of work on hand there," said Markham sullenly. His face wore a look of careless ill-temper.

"Your work can wait," said Mrs. Proctor. "There are things here that can't wait. Flaxton is tearing his hair—"

"Let him tear it," said Markham, "besides I can see him on Saturday morning. It won't take me half an hour to polish him off! Then I can go by the afternoon train."

Mrs. Proctor said no more. She looked at that moment almost helplessly miserable. She turned to Rina.

"It has stopped raining. Would you care to come in the garden before luncheon?"

Rina was only too thankful to seize the chance to escape. She was so acutely conscious of that unequal conflict between the mother and son that it seemed to make her nerves tingle. Even his jesting allusions to their differences returned to her mind with a sting they had never held before. She realized that deep forces were at work, and she could discern the hidden hand of Adrian Guise detaching Markham from Stones and all that it stood for.

There was born within her a strong desire to save Markham. To take him away from this man who was his friend. She saw that his mother as well as Father Laurence perceived the danger and were powerless to avert it. She became aware for the first time that it was quite possible that Markham might love her, and that if he did she could perhaps help in the task of saving him.

This thought made her attitude toward him one of dangerous susceptibility. The ambition to reform a man has induced countless women to make unhappy and even disastrous marriages. Love at first seemed so strong, so capable of performing the miraculous, of forging stronger chains than those that held and imprisoned the victim they desired to set free. But there must always come a day when love, while not necessarily weakening, becomes less passionate, less absorbing, and it is precisely in that day that the peril lies. Rina, with her splendid youth, her strong brave spirit, felt capable of detaching Markham as completely from Adrian Guise as even his mother could desire. She was ready to pit her strength against their two strengths. She saw and recognized the danger to Markham's faith; it was one of the few positive evils of which in her innocence of life she was fully aware. She had been taught, as indeed every Catholic is taught, to avoid with extreme rigor all dangers that threaten faith. They are the dangers that are to be shunned, avoided, fled from, not fought in open conflict. They are crafty, insidious dangers, to be dreaded because of the everlasting consequences they may bring to the soul they have ruined.

Hidden in every woman is the missionary. This thought of rescuing Markham from a dangerous friendship thrilled Rina. She had not fallen in love, but there had been awakened within her that warm and eager interest which is often the precursor of love. She had never been alone with any man in her life as she had been alone with Markham during the past few days. And his conversation, his undoubted artistic gifts, the gay allure and careless charm of him, had interested her and in a sense stimulated her. The novelty had been agreeable. She had shaken off some of the cobwebs that had clung to her

mind after those years of repression and discipline in the old palace; she seemed to breathe a fresher and lighter air, to have become more human. The world was a pleasant place. Stones was a beautiful and romantic spot. She would be sorry to go away, to close, as it were, the first chapter.

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In the garden whither she now went with Mrs. Proctor, the scent of wet earth, of drenched leaves and spring flowers mingled deliciously with the soft brackish wind that was blowing straight in from the not too far distant Atlantic. In the sky, spaces of bright blue that looked like lakes were outlined with ranges of snowy clouds shaped like mountains. The hills were painted dark to-day and showed their forms with clear precision against the sky.

It was a typical day of English spring, capricious and showery but full of the promise of life, a growing day for the young leaves and plants and blossoms. The Cotswold air was like wine; it held a clean, pure, invigorating quality.

Mrs. Proctor walked briskly, purposefully. She was very fond of her garden when she was at Stones, though capable of entirely forgetting it during her long absences. She was physically energetic as her son was physically indolent. She carried a basket, a spud, and a big pair of scissors, and she stopped occasionally to remove a weed. At first she did not say much, but led the way into the big walled kitchen garden while Rina followed her in silence.

"I must get some flowers," she said, "if the rain hasn't ruined them all. I hope you don't mind the damp?"

"I love it!" said Rina, lifting her face to meet the soft wind that blew back her uncovered hair in delicious little crisp tendrils. "I love this English air—it seems to blow all soft and damp from the sea."

Mrs. Proctor gave her a quick, sharp look that was not without tenderness. She had her own reasons for wishing Rina to love the soft-blowing English air, but it was too early as yet to speak of them. She had never before seen any girl who she felt would be worthy of her son, for with all his faults and all the anxiety he caused her to suffer, he was inexpressibly dear to her.

The walled garden was planted with innumerable apple trees that were hardly as yet breaking into blossom, although the buds were full and showed a hint of pink. The high gray stone walls were almost covered with fruit trees, peaches, plums, and apricots. Grass paths flanked by herbaceous borders made emerald spaces between the wide

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earth beds where the spring vegetables were growing up beyond the gnarled silvery stems of the apple trees. At the end of one of these paths Mrs. Proctor stopped before a bank that was half covered with daffodils, blossoming in a sunny corner. Those soldier-flowers with their golden helmets, their delicate silver-green swords, were drenched with rain, but it had been too light and soft to spoil them or fling them to the ground. Mrs. Proctor stooped and shook them gently and a little shower of raindrops fell from them. She gathered them very carefully, cutting clean through each thick and juicy stalk with her sharp scissors. She laid the blooms down side by side in the basket with their green blades beside them. When she had finished this task she stood up and said suddenly to Rina:

"Has Markham spoken to you of Adrian Guise?"

Rina was a little taken aback by the abrupt question.

"Yes, he has talked about him," she said almost reluctantly.

She had the kind of scrupulous respect for the uttered word, as if it were in the nature of a confidence, that some very sensitive persons have.

"You know what I am afraid of?" said Mrs. Proctor.

She nodded. "I can guess. But don't be too much afraid. He has so many things"—she glanced instinctively toward the beautiful gray pile nestling among its ancient trees—"to make him proud of his faith."

"My dear Rina, it's all very well to talk like that, but Mr. Guise is a very dangerous man. He is clever and insidious and subtle. And when Markham talks of going back to town on Saturday we all know he is going to see him." Her hard, energetic face suddenly assumed a look of intense, almost weak

helplessness. "He is taking my son away from me," she continued with bitterness, "he will take him right away unless the miracle happens."

"The miracle?" Rina was off her guard; she uttered the question without due reflection.

Mrs. Proctor cleared her throat.

"If he were to fall in love with and marry the right woman—a woman strong enough to hold him, to keep him away from that *milieu*—we should hear no more of the Guises. That is the only way he can find safety."

Purposely she did not look at Rina as she spoke.

The girl was silent. She was certain that Mrs. Proctor had said those words with a grave purpose and intention; she felt almost as if by some obscure process of telepathy their minds were communing without necessity of speech upon this very subject of Markham. It was as if the elder woman had really said: "Are you strong enough? Could you love my son well enough to keep him away from this danger?" And in her heart Rina was answering silently: "Oh, I would try to love him enough—I would try to keep him!"

She felt as if her very journey to England just then had held a significant and profound purpose. It had been made less to get away from the affair of Maria Binaldi and her brother than to bring her here. She had been flung across Markham's path at the moment perhaps when he most needed her. And something that she did not as yet recognize as love thrilled and stirred in her heart.

Then Mrs. Proctor's voice broke the silence.

"I think—I hope—that my boy has fallen in love with you, Rina!"

She looked such an odd, almost pathetic figure, standing there on the wet grass, with her short tweed skirt displaying strong country boots and even a mar-

gin of black woollen stocking of serviceable thickness. A hard, much-stitched tweed hat of severe and manly shape was pressed down upon her head, almost covering her fine gray hair. The basket, full of gleaming daffodils, was on her arm. There was emotion in her weather-beaten face, in her hard, keen eyes. She was gazing at Rina almost with entreaty. And still Rina did not speak. Some instinct warned her against the premature disclosure of any part of her thoughts to Markham's mother.

"He has not told you?" said Mrs. Proctor.

"No, he has said nothing of the kind except in jest the first day I was here," said Rina. She protected herself behind a mask of frigid indifference.

"When I saw you in Florence I felt at once that if he were to see you and fall in love with you, you would be the one woman in the world to save him."

"What made you think that?" said Rina.

"You are unlike other girls—at least you are unlike the English ones. I felt you would be a new type to Markham—you would interest him and as an artist he would admire your beauty. There was something unusual about you. I made the experiment—I brought you here——"

"Yes?" said Rina, faintly curious to hear more. She felt as if they were discussing a third person to whom both were indifferent.

"You were a good Catholic—I knew you had been brought up very carefully. I thought *at least Markham shall see her.* You must forgive me, for when I tell you this it sounds like an intrigue. And now all I know is that he is furious at your leaving us on Saturday. He means to console himself by going back to town to the Guises!"

"He said he wished to come to see me in town. My aunt is to go there in May."

"And if he tells Adrian Guise of that intention

don't you suppose he will use every means in his power—make every effort—to keep him from doing so? Perhaps I am exaggerating, but I feel as if he and his wife were determined to ruin Markham spiritually—to make him lose his faith. It is a conflict— and I am powerless. But if you loved my son——"

"I—I hardly know him," faltered Rina, afraid lest those piercing eyes should divine her scarcely-acknowledged secret.

"I saw that you and he had made friends very quickly," observed Mrs. Proctor.

"Yes," she admitted.

"Markham can be very attractive. He is so gay —so careless. He is like a boy till one tries to thwart him, and then he is a hard, stern, obstinate man."

"I will pray for him," said Rina. She felt that it was the only thing that was left for her to say. The conversation was beginning to exhaust her endurance. It was impossible for her to reveal her own heart in such a way as to comfort and satisfy Markham's mother. She could only parry those questions and assertions that tried to force the truth from her. She was bewildered; she did not even know whether she cared for him, whether she wished to help, whether indeed she did not want to turn her face from Stones and its little tragedy forever. Even if she did love and did care, would there not be an essential bitterness in the task of helping to raise the man who should by rights have strengthened her? This surely would detract from the sweetness of love, and mar its perfection.

"I hope your aunt will let him come to her house," said Mrs. Proctor, "I should like you to see each other again."

At that moment Markham appeared through the

gate and strolled toward them in his graceful, indolent, languid fashion.

"How very serious you look, my dear mamma," he said, smiling as he approached them. "Have you been talking to Donna Rina for her good? Advice on staying with one's English relations for the first time. What not to do. Hints on general behavior at meals!" He looked from one to the other, laughing.

"Donna Rina does not require lessons of that kind," said his mother. She laid her hand on his shoulder and smiled at him.

They stood together in that position, and to see them thus no one would ever have imagined the deep and vital cause of dispute between them.

"Donna Rina must come back," said Markham in a light, affectionate tone. "I want to finish her portrait and I want to see her again."

He put out his hand impulsively and touched Rina's. It was a confident little gesture, at once frank and intimate.

"She must come whenever she likes—whenever she can," said Mrs. Proctor.

"I shall be delighted to come," said Rina.

She felt that this could not possibly be the end; she must return to Stones even if it cost her a struggle.

"Is that a promise, please?" said Markham.

"Yes—it is a promise—if nothing prevents me."

"Nothing must prevent you," said Markham.

They went indoors, Rina walking between the mother and the son. As it was nearly luncheon time, she went straight up to her room to take off her coat. She had hardly performed this action when there was a brisk tap at the door and Mrs. Proctor, already divested of the hard hat, appeared on the threshold.

"Dear Rina," she said. She went up to the girl and kissed her on both cheeks.

Rina drew back a little. She still had a vague wish to escape from Stones as from a place that threatened permanent imprisonment.

"I—I don't understand," she faltered.

"Your promise to come back to us. Oh, my dear—he wishes it—he wishes it. It lies with you to be his wife."

"I think you are making a mistake," said Rina. "Of course I shall want to come back—I've been so happy here. But you mustn't suppose there's any other reason."

She spoke with a quiet decision.

"I am sure he could teach you to care for him," said Mrs. Proctor, aware of the girl's prudent reticence, and wondering what it might hide.

She went out of the room. Rina felt a little cold with excitement. Doubts assailed her; she was not sure of her own feeling for Markham, and she rightly judged that she would have to go quite away from him in order to be able to discover it. He was a bright, beautiful stranger who had laid spells upon her, temporarily fascinating her. Away from his gay, captivating presence, in a sober, commonplace atmosphere, she would be enabled to see him in true proportion. She would learn if this strange, almost imprudent joy she felt now was a passing thing without stability or a permanent emotion. Away from the magic charm of his personality she would surely learn to appraise her feeling at its true value. But she must have time—she fought against the idea of being rushed. She knew quite well that it would be premature of Markham to speak of love to her now. She was not going to allow herself to be swayed by this passing emotion that colored the whole world anew, and cast its glamour over the

mind after those years of repression and discipline in the old palace; she seemed to breathe a fresher and lighter air, to have become more human. The world was a pleasant place. Stones was a beautiful and romantic spot. She would be sorry to go away, to close, as it were, the first chapter.

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there been many English people in Florence this spring? She made Rina come and sit nearer the fire, and proceeded to pour out some tea into the delicate old china cups.

She had been perhaps prettier than Helen in her youth, but she had not worn nearly so well. Her fair hair had faded to a nondescript greyish hue; her blue eyes had lost their brightness, and her figure though not stout had become unshapely. She was indolent and inactive by nature, and occasionally imposed mortifications upon herself in the shape of unwonted physical exertions which temporarily impaired her health.

"I hope I didn't drag you away from a very pleasant visit, Rina," she said, nibbling some thin bread and butter. "But the fact was I didn't feel quite easy in my mind about your being at Stones at all. Your mother in her letter said nothing to me about your going there first, and if she had asked my advice I should have recommended her to refuse the invitation for you."

"Oh, but Mrs. Proctor did ask me when we were in Florence and mother said I could arrange to go perhaps when I was in London with you," said Rina, feeling a little startled and vaguely alarmed.

"But dear Helen has been out of England for so many years she can hardly decide these things wisely for you," said Lady Ellington. "It would have been better for her to ask me and then I should have told her quite frankly to let you go there by all means, as long as Mrs. Proctor's son wasn't there."

Rina put down her cup. She felt physically a little sick, so suddenly did her heart sink with the dismay caused by this speech.

Lady Ellington had that kind of mind which almost unconsciously assimilates odd scraps of intelligence about people, and which is so often accom-

panied by a persistently retentive memory. She had always heard that Markham was a troublesome young man, and, like many other Catholic mothers, she had not sought his acquaintance in consequence of those rumors. She had defended her own little flock from the wolf.

"I hope he was not at Stones during your visit?" said Lady Ellington, who was fortunately too short-sighted to observe the symptoms of agitation which Rina displayed.

"Yes, he was there," said Rina quietly.

She was aware of displaying a defensive reticence that was new to her. She did not want to talk about Markham, to discuss him in an atmosphere that was so evidently unsympathetic. To speak of him intimately and to reveal anything she had learned about him in her visit would have been impossible to her, would even have been in her eyes an act of direct disloyalty.

Markham was the bright and conspicuous figure in the foreground of her thoughts, and she knew that whatever happened in the future he would not quickly yield that place to another; he would not fade and become indistinct, as Toni Delfini had done. It hurt her to have him even so slightly besmirched, and to know too that there was adequate reason for that besmirching touched her to the quick.

"Well, a few days like that can't matter," continued Lady Ellington; "and I hope you didn't see a great deal of him. However, when Mrs. Proctor wrote and begged me to allow you to remain another week, I own I felt afraid and I put my foot down. You must forgive me if you felt disappointed, but Perry said I was quite right. He doesn't know young Mr. Proctor, but he has heard of him, and he felt too that he would not be the best companion for a young girl like yourself!"

So the affair had been discussed and judged before this little tribunal, and the verdict given against any prolonging of the risks to which they considered she had been exposed at Stones.

"Mrs. Proctor was sorry, I think, that you would not let me stay longer," said Rina simply. "I—I wanted to come here." She felt that she could say this with perfect truth.

"That's right, my dear, we have been wanting you, too. I always told Helen she ought to let you come and stay with us and get to know your cousins. I hope you will like being in England, Rina. Of course it is a very great change for you. The climate—and then your having lived so long in Florence—out of the world, as it were. It has always puzzled me that Helen should have exiled herself so completely. But I fancy the old prince must be very exacting. You don't remember your father, do you, Rina? He was the handsomest man I ever saw."

"No, I don't remember him. I was hardly two years old when he died."

"You've got a look of him, of course—about the eyes and mouth, I think. Your mother fell in love with him the first time she saw him—it was a case of love at first sight with both of them. I remember we all thought it very odd at the time because Helen was never at all susceptible. But I am sure if he hadn't proposed to her she would never have married at all."

Rina was deeply interested. Her mother had never told her any details of that love of hers; she had only guessed that it must have been a poignant, passionate thing, very deep and enduring, and that the sense of loss even after more than twenty years prevented her from ever alluding to it. Now she thought to herself: "Am I like that? Did I fall in

love at first sight? No, this isn't love—it's not possible that I can care for Markham in that way." These thoughts brought a little warm flush to her face, a brightness to her eyes. She said aloud with something of an effort:

"My mother has never talked much about him to me. I don't think she can bear to speak of him, somehow."

"Ah, Helen was always reserved," said Lady Ellington in a comfortable, placid tone, feeling how much her sister missed of the true enjoyment of life. "After I married she never talked freely even to me. She used to imagine I told everything to Peregrine—my husband. But I remember being surprised when she wrote to tell me about her engagement—to an Italian."

Lady Ellington was fond of reminiscences and always welcomed a patient, attentive listener. Rina had been well trained to habits of patience and attention in the old palace, and they stood her in such good stead now that she had not the slightest wish to interrupt. Besides, she felt a strong curiosity to hear more of her mother's love story.

"Where were they engaged?" she asked.

"Oh, hasn't she ever told you? It was at San Remo. She went there for the winter, as the doctor said her chest was delicate. My father was very fussy indeed about Helen—if she coughed once he sent for the doctor. He was a strict, severe man—we were afraid of him. But he spoiled Helen. She was the youngest, you see. I have often noticed that parents spoil their younger children more than the elder ones."

It was impossible for Lady Ellington to tell a succinct story; she was always branching off to explain side issues, whether necessary to the whole or not.

"So he took her to San Remo and there they met

some friends, Lord and Lady Northdown. With them there was a young man, Don Andrea Ubinaldi, the Marchese San Raimondo. He was staying at their villa. And as I told you Helen fell in love with him at first sight. I'm not surprised, Rina, for he was really extraordinarily handsome and attractive, with charming gay manners. He spoke English well, for he belonged to a cosmopolitan set. He wasn't like your old grandfather in that respect. My father wouldn't hear of it at first—he was too English to like foreigners, as he called them, and he didn't want his precious Helen to go and live abroad. He brought her home and she was really ill then—she looked like a wreck. She was very sweet and patient and never rebelled, but she looked as if she were going to die. My father took fright and he sent for Andrea, the engagement was announced and the marriage took place almost at once. I don't think your mother's ever troubled with her chest now, is she, Rina? It is odd, because she was such a delicate girl. We'd no idea that your father wasn't strong; he always seemed perfectly well, but we heard later he had been delicate as a boy, and he hadn't the constitution to fight against a bad illness when it came. It was a great blow to Helen—it seemed to crush her. She was so young when he died, only twenty-three. We used to hope that she would marry again. Many people thought her pretty."

"But she is very pretty now," said Rina thoughtfully.

"Yes, in a middle-aged way," said Lady Ellington complacently, "that isn't the prettiness of youth, though."

She was five or six years older than her sister, but she had only been married three years before Helen, so that her children were scarcely older than Rina.

"My father died about the same time, which was of course a double grief to Helen," she went on, "and that is perhaps why she has stayed on in Florence, hardly ever returning home. I often wonder if she is happy in her life there. She has hardly any freedom. She can't even decide things for herself, which is one of the advantages of being a widow, I always think. I'd no idea she had kept up all these years with Janet Proctor. They used to be friends when they were at school together. Has she often visited you in Florence? Was it there you met her and her son?"

"I had never seen her son till I came to England," said Rina, "but Mrs. Proctor has often passed through Florence in the spring on her way to England, and she always came to see mother."

Rina had thought very little about Mrs. Proctor in those days, and she had never felt particularly attracted toward the singularly dressed Englishwoman who generally greeted her with a curt: "Goodness, child, how you've grown!" Sometimes the greeting would be accompanied by a smacking kiss which Rina could remember resenting when she was small. Mrs. Proctor had been her mother's friend, who came to see her mother. It was only in the past few days that she had become in Rina's thoughts that very wonderful thing—the mother of Markham Proctor.

"It must be a great grief to her having that kind of son," said Lady Ellington in a ruminative tone. "I've been told he altogether refuses to live at home now and the place is quite deserted. I'm so thankful dear Perry isn't like that; but then he goes to the opposite extreme and it's as much as I can do to get him away from Queen's Barn for a single week. But it isn't only for that one must blame Mr. Proctor; it is for being mixed up with such a

bad un-Catholic set of people, with an apostate such as Mr. Guise!"

Rina was silent; she felt as if she had received a sudden blow. Although Lady Ellington had said nothing but the absolute truth, had told her nothing that she did not already know, this judgment of an impartial witness stabbed her like a sword. What could she say? She had no defence to make.

"Does he paint well? Somebody told me he had a great talent. Did you see any of his work?" inquired her aunt.

"I did not see much of his work. But he painted my portrait. It was for that Mrs. Proctor asked you if I might stay a little longer—in order that he might be able to finish it. But he worked so hard—it was almost done."

Lady Ellington looked at her so attentively that the girl colored faintly under that searching scrutiny.

"And was it good? Was it like you?"

"It was not quite finished—but yes, I thought it was good. One is not a good judge of one's own portrait, perhaps. To me it seemed flattering."

"I dare say an artist would admire you very much," said Lady Ellington rather as if she were discussing a person who was not present. "One does not often see that dark golden hair with brown eyes—at least not in England. You are very Italian in appearance, my dear, you are not at all like your mother."

"In Italy," said Rina with a smile, "they always tell me I am so English-looking. Grandpapa used to be quite distressed about it."

"No one would think that here," said Lady Ellington, whose personal remarks uttered in that languid, absent-minded tone seemed to become almost impersonal. "But you are certainly the type that an

artist would admire, and to tell you the truth I was half afraid from what I had heard about you that Mr. Proctor might annoy you with his attentions."

Rina wondered if her aunt had any ulterior reason for her persistence in bringing the conversation thus assiduously back to Markham. But when she looked at her she could almost convince herself that Lady Ellington looked incapable of harboring an ulterior motive. Like all garrulous people, however, she was curious, and she wished Rina would be a little more communicative about this young man. She had had such unusual opportunities of gathering information about him, and it was certainly strange that she should be so reluctant to impart it. Lady Ellington was not really uncharitable, but she was too fond of talking to be quite discreet, and therein lay her danger—a danger which Rina was beginning to discern.

They had finished tea and there was no sign of the cousins. But Lady Ellington was delighted to have this long and uninterrupted conversation with her niece. She presently resumed in a gentle confidential tone:

"Helen told me that you had had an offer of marriage—it had something to do with her sending you to England. I suppose you didn't care for him, and I think it was a pity myself, for your mother said he belonged to an old Florentine family and had plenty of money. It is always best for women to marry, Rina, and I am very anxious Molly should make a good Catholic marriage. Unfortunately there are not many Catholic young men who are at all eligible—most of them have no money at all. Of course, I should never let her marry a Protestant, or even a careless Catholic like that young Mr. Proctor. She is twenty-two now—two years older than you are, Rina, and she hasn't had a sin-

gle offer. I don't understand it, for she is really quite pretty and such a dear girl, and she will have her own little fortune the day she marries. But about this man who wished to marry you—who is he, my dear?"

"He is Conte Antonio Delfini," said Rina. "He lives with his sister, Contessa Binaldi, in Florence —she was a friend of mine—and she tried to arrange it with grandpapa."

Somehow, although she would have preferred not to speak of the matter, it gave her no pain to discuss Toni, she felt none of that shrinking reluctance she had experienced when her aunt questioned her about Markham.

"What a pity," said Lady Ellington, "I am told that in Italy a girl gets *passée* far sooner than she does here—at twenty-five she is already an old maid. Whereas here lots of women of over thirty make quite excellent marriages and they do not look too old either. I should not wish to run the risk with Molly—I should prefer her to marry soon. Perhaps something may happen this year in town, although I am not very hopeful about it. Molly is happier in the country and she looks her best riding or dressed in country clothes. Still, one must not leave any stone unturned when it is a question of one's daughter's happiness. I should have asked Janet Proctor to bring her son here long ago if I had only had a better account of him. But I am not the only Catholic mother who refuses to have him in her house—we have to be careful, my dear Rina."

Rina repressed a smile. That Markham should have failed to comply with the standard of eligibility laid down by her aunt amused rather than offended her. But the smile faded quickly from her face. What if her aunt refused to permit Markham to come to visit her in London? What if she wrote

her views to Helen and induced her to prevent a second visit to Stones?

"He would never have got Molly to sit still long enough to have her portrait painted," said Lady Ellington musingly. "Did you mind it, Rina? The sitting still so long, I mean?"

"I am accustomed to sit still," said Rina, "mother and I always sit perfectly still for about two hours with grandpapa every evening. We work and read, but we must not make any kind of noise. He can not bear us to be restless—to move about. When I was little he used to punish me if I did not keep still."

"Ah, I have heard he was very severe with you," said Lady Ellington. "Still, I think it's the best way to bring up children; it makes them more careful of their behavior. I didn't do it with mine, but then I was too delicate, and really they are very good now—it answered quite well. I wonder, though, that Helen did not interfere; she must have resented it."

"This is the first time we've ever rebelled against him," said Rina; "mother took my part—she said I needn't marry Toni if I did not care for him."

"And you don't feel as if you were beginning to regret it now?" asked Lady Ellington, who sincerely believed that every woman must in her heart regret the impulsive refusal of a really brilliant offer of marriage, forgetting that the years of youth are usually the least worldly ones.

"Not in the least!" said Rina, laughing.

But how thankful she felt that she had had the courage and decision to oppose the marriage was really apparent to her then for the first time. This had been the cause of her journey to England, and of her subsequent meeting with Markham that had changed for her the whole significance of life.

"I think," she added impulsively, "that I'm more glad every day. For you see it wasn't an easy thing for me to do."

CHAPTER XIII

THE dinner hour was approaching, and as the two cousins had not returned, Lady Ellington suggested that Rina might like to go up to her room. A maid was sent to wait on her and she found that her trunks were already unpacked, and many of their contents lay wrapped in silver paper on the bed, prior to being put away into the great deep chests and wardrobes that were opened to receive them. Rina was accustomed to waiting upon herself, and as soon as the process of unpacking was finished, she dismissed the maid with a smile. She always did her own hair, which was dressed in an extremely simple manner now that she had abandoned the more elaborate style which Maria Binaldi had recommended. She wanted to be alone, to think; she hoped to have at least this half-hour to herself.

It was clear that Lady Ellington had prejudged Markham, and her air of gentle finality had alarmed Rina. The obstinacy of very gentle women is usually an unbendable thing and altogether too soft to be broken by rough methods. Rina had taken her aunt's measure, and she perceived that once an opinion had been formed in that pale blond head it would be impossible ever to dislodge it. A whole series of difficulties now presented themselves to her in a kind of dismal procession. Already she had foreseen the possibility of Markham's being refused ingress into the house in Prince's Gate. She

had foreseen, too, that some remonstrance would be made if she suggested returning to Stones in the event of Mrs. Proctor's repeating the invitation. But now she looked farther into the future and saw the kind of difficulties that would inevitably arise should Markham declare his love for her and ask her to marry him, as she was secretly beginning to hope and believe that he might. Her mother would most naturally require the minutest particulars about his character and reputation, and to whom could she turn but to her sister? From her she would learn without doubt that Markham was an unsatisfactory son who had become the intimate friend of the apostate author, Adrian Guise. Bohemian in his tastes, refusing to live at home, neglecting both his mother and his property—that was the kind of character which Lady Ellington would bestow upon him. The fact that he was a friend of the Guises would surely also betray a certain indifference to his religion, if nothing worse. And then if the Marchesa San Raimondo wished to know anything further of this man Guise, whose influence was paramount in Markham's life, she need only turn to his written word—to a book, for example, like "The Chessboard."

As Rina followed this melancholy train of thought to its logical conclusion she began to realize the rocks that lay ahead of her. She saw that such a marriage could only be looked at askance by the prevailing powers in Florence. Rina was perfectly reasonable. She knew that her grandfather and her mother also would be pre-eminently right in forbidding such a marriage and in using all their power to prevent it. They would require for her—as an irreducible minimum and one not to be altered for any reason in the world—a man who was a good practising Catholic. Birth and fortune would be

placed second and third on the list. Rina was not a girl to make light of their prejudices; to a very great extent she shared and accepted them. But she was beginning to feel that she herself would be prepared to run the risk. That was where the final conflict would lie. It was an unusual, abnormal risk, and as far as possible they would safeguard her from it. They, in their very natural anxiety and solicitude for her welfare, would be inclined to exaggerate the peril, while Rina, on the other hand, would probably minimize it.

She had not yet been a week in England and this problem had arisen.

Rina sat down near the dressing-table and unfastening her long corn-colored hair began to brush it. The rhythmic, almost mechanical action soothed her. She began to think of what Lady Ellington had told her with regard to her mother's betrothal and marriage—of that impetuous, impulsive falling in love which had once seemed to her so impossible that she had felt it could only happen in books. Yet it could and did evidently happen with the least impulsive people, such as her mother had always been. Helen had suffered very deeply; she had paid for her brief, radiant happiness in long years of separation from her beloved. She had never forgotten. Always on the anniversary of Andrea's death the old palace was a house of mourning, when Masses for the dead were said without intermission in the chapel from early morning until noon. Andrea's wife had never loved again, and she had spent those long years as the unselfish slave of his tyrannical old father. Had she been happy? Had she been secretly miserable? But in any case she had had always before her eyes a beautiful memory of realized love. She would not therefore easily step in to frustrate her

daughter's happiness, of that Rina felt sure. There were certain things, however, which Catholic parents and guardians had a right to exact; things they might be blamed for neglecting and that belonged inexorably to their high suretyship. Rina was forced to confess that all she knew, all she could tell them of Markham, would not be in the least likely to correspond with their least exacting demands.

Her long hair fell over her shoulders in waves of warm gold, touched to copper in the shadows; she was glad now to think that its color had evoked Markham's artistic admiration. Her small, pale face was lit by the two long, dark eyes that were shining as they had never shone in Florence. She saw herself as Markham had portrayed her, and she felt as if that portrait had for the first time revealed to her all the possibilities that were latent within her. And through all his gay nonsense she had been aware of a deep strain of poetry, of reflection, in Markham. His imagination had found a ready response in hers. In all her life she had never talked to any one with such ease, such frankness. Was it love, swift, passionate, mutual, that had bestowed upon them this deep, wonderful understanding of each other? Was it indeed love such as her father and mother had known? Was Markham to be the one thing that mattered in all her life?

She had fastened up her hair in its big, loose, golden knot when she heard a timid knock at the door.

"Come in," she said.

Molly Ellington opened the door and came into the room with a little rush.

"Rina, darling, you've come at last! I'm so glad!"

She threw her arms eagerly round her cousin's neck and kissed her.

"How lovely you're looking," she said, gazing at her with girlish admiration.

"Don't tell stories," said Rina; "no one looks lovely after a long, dusty railway journey."

She looked up at Molly and smiled. She felt so much older and more experienced than this young cousin, who was as unsophisticated a maiden as ever emerged from a convent school.

She was pretty, even charming in a quite commonplace way. She had light, soft, flaxen hair, blue eyes, a complexion of cream and roses with a little dust of freckles on her short nose. Slightly thick and square in figure, her loose silk blouse and short serge skirt did little to mitigate this awkwardness. But she was fresh and wholesome, and one felt that her mind was clear as crystal with no muddy deposits.

"I was afraid you never meant to come! Was Mrs. Proctor such an attraction? I've only seen her once—she rather frightened me."

"She seemed to want me to stay with her," said Rina evasively.

"Was it amusing at Stones? Did she have a large party?"

"No one else was staying there. She was just alone with her son."

"Well, I'm glad you've torn yourself away anyhow. We shan't let you go again in a hurry. I must fly and dress now. It's nearly eight and I'm almost always late and then Perry gets annoyed."

She left the room also with a little rush. Molly gave one the impression of being permanently in a hurry, of being engaged in perpetual pursuit of lost time. She was both untidy and unpunctual by nature, and in spite of her strict convent training had

never learned to eradicate these failings. Rina was actually shocked the first time she caught a glimpse of Molly's bedroom and the untidiness thereof.

Rina finished dressing and went downstairs; she had put on the dress Markham had called buff. The April evening was chilly and there was a big fire blazing in the drawing-room. The house was much less stately and imposing than Stones, being about half the size, but it was more homely and comfortable. The drawing-room was a big, irregularly shaped apartment, its roomy chairs were covered with faded chintzes of old-fashioned pattern; the carpet had become threadbare in places; the innumerable tables were covered with books and an odd assortment of objects in which much that was absolute rubbish mingled with things that were really valuable and charming. One missed the controlling taste of Markham which made itself felt so strongly in all the details at Stones. The redeeming feature of this room at Queen's Barn lay in the quantities of flowers, both cut and in pots, that were distributed everywhere and made a kind of glow of beauty, of harmony and color. This prodigal blossoming made it possible to overlook the want of cohesion, of restraining order.

Rina was alone when she entered the room, and she had just had time to observe these details when the door opened and a young man came in. He was rather short, but made more sparely than his sister; he had very closely cropped, fair hair, a reddish face, and blue eyes. His features were carelessly modeled, the nose short and blunt, the mouth wide, the forehead too high. Like Molly, he resembled his mother in coloring, but he had not a trace of her beauty. However, he smiled in rather a pleasant, spontaneous way as he advanced toward Rina, holding out his hand.

"Very glad you've come," he said; "we hoped from what Aunt Helen said that you'd have been here last Tuesday. Did you stop in Paris?"

"Yes—a day or two. Since then I've been staying at Stones with Mrs. Proctor."

"Yes—so mother said," he remarked, and the smile vanished from his face, "was her son there?"

"Yes," said Rina.

"What sort of a chap is he? We were at the same school, but he's older than I am—he left before I went. Seems to have been a bit mad from all accounts."

Rina was silent; she fixed her eyes on the threadbare carpet.

"A bit of a queer fish from all I can hear," continued Peregrine, wondering why his cousin made no remark.

"Is he? I think he is clever."

She was getting accustomed to hearing this denigrating criticism of Markham, and she wondered why instead of impairing her feeling for him seemed to add to its intensity, to make her long for the moment when she would have the right and privilege openly to defend him.

"Oh, have you seen Molly yet?" said Peregrine, changing the subject with some abruptness, as suddenly aware that his cousin disliked discussing

"Yes, she came to my room just now when was dressing."

Peregrine gave her a quick look. He had prepared for some measure of prettiness in his sin, but her unusual and arresting loveliness a profound impression upon him. She was so she seemed so much taller than himself—and small head was crowned with that golden dance of hair. In all the details of her dress was simple and dainty; everything was finish

careful. Accustomed to something of negligence, if not of actual slovenliness, in both his mother and sister, he was pleased with his own quick appreciation of qualities so different.

Lady Ellington trailed in languidly.

"Oh, there you are, Rina. Perry dear, you were very late. Did you have a nice afternoon?"

"Very nice, mother. We played two whole rounds. Do you play golf?" he asked, turning to Rina. He did not as yet feel quite able to address this young vision by her Christian name.

Rina shook her head and smiled.

"I'm afraid I don't play any games at all."

"Ah, you are like Helen," said Lady Ellington; "she never cared for games. When we were girls lawn-tennis was all the rage; girls didn't play golf so much then. But I am sure Helen never had a racquet in her hands. Don't people play golf and tennis in Florence?"

"Oh, yes, they play; especially the English colony. But grandpapa wouldn't have approved of it for me," said Rina.

Peregrine opened his blue eyes very wide and gazed at her with an expression of profound and pitying astonishment.

"Must you really do what he says?" he asked.

"Yes," said Rina, "at least, nearly always." She thought of Toni and how she had been driven at last to rebellion.

"But—such tyranny!" said Peregrine.

English country life and its cycle of games and sports, the hunting, the fishing and shooting, the golf, cricket and lawn-tennis, sufficed for all his needs. He adored it, and was never happy away from his home, which provided him with all these things. To look after his property at Queen's Barn gave him sufficient occupation of a more se-

rious kind. He asked nothing else of life, and like Horace could only have prayed for a continuance of such benefits as he had received. He seldom left his home, which was situated on the outskirts of a lovely Hampshire village with the glimpses of the silver winding Test flowing through his own meadows, and the low, green undulations of the downs delicately painted against the distant sky. He was not only satisfied, but he sincerely pitied those whose lot was not cast upon similar lines. Just at this moment he felt a deep compassion for Rina, who sat there looking so unconscious of misfortune.

"Molly's late as usual," he observed with a slight frown when dinner had been announced and his sister still failed to appear.

"You were rather late coming back, you know," his mother reminded him.

Although they were excellent comrades, Lady Ellington considered that Peregrine was apt to be hard on his sister; he was so keenly critical of her faults.

"Oh, she's had as much time as I had—she's a regular dawdler," he pronounced.

"We won't wait for her," said Lady Ellington.

They went into the dining-room, a long, low room with an ancient ceiling of polished oak, black with years. It had the same qualities of old-fashioned, somewhat shabby comfort as the rest of the house. This, as Rina was to learn, was by no means to be attributed to lack of money; the Ellingtons were quite well off, but it was due to a want of initiative and energy and to a habit of incurable procrastination. To choose fresh carpets and chintzes and curtains would have been for Lady Ellington a fatiguing effort. It was a task beyond the practical abilities of Molly, and Peregrine, man-like, scarcely noticed the dilapidations. And the house in itself

was a charming old Elizabethan structure, paneled almost throughout, and possessing such natural advantages and so much that was homelike and comfortable, that only a very carping mind could really have found fault with its little deficiencies and imperfections of detail. But it contrasted unfavorably in Rina's mind with the ordered splendor of Stones.

When they were all eating their soup Molly came into the room.

"You might have been punctual to-night just for a change," said Peregrine.

Molly's hair was untidy and little fair wisps of it hung about her neck. There were little stains on the front of her white tea-gown and she had all the look of having dressed in a great hurry. Peregrine, who was perfectly accustomed to a certain inattention to detail on his sister's part, felt to-night curiously irritated with it. He was himself always *soigné* in appearance, and this evening he had made a more careful toilet than usual, as if anxious to produce a favorable impression upon his cousin.

"Rina musn't expect this to be a properly conducted establishment like Mrs. Proctor's," said Molly, with a good-humored smile.

Peregrine turned to his cousin.

"Have they got much shooting at Stones? Of course it isn't nearly such a good country as this."

"I haven't an idea. I—I didn't ask," said Rina, who felt that she would not have been much wiser even if she had been told.

"Any fishing?" inquired Peregrine.

She shook her head, smiling.

"I think Mr. Proctor cares more for painting than for sport."

"How he *can!*" said Peregrine. "The hunting round there is pretty good, I've heard. Pity he

doesn't go in for sport." He looked profoundly gloomy to think of such wasted opportunities.

"He seems to work quite hard," said Rina.

"Work?" Peregrine repeated.

"I mean at painting."

"Yes, but he needn't. They've got pots of money."

"Perhaps he likes it," Rina ventured timidly.

This suggestion only served to deepen Peregrine's gloom.

"He must be mad. They used to say at school he was a bit balmy."

It seemed to him that this was really the most charitable construction he could put upon such marked eccentricity.

"My dear, do you get up early?" said Lady Ellington suddenly to Rina. "For I am afraid there is only an early Mass—it's at eight o'clock and the church is down in the village—quite ten minutes' walk."

"Oh, I'm accustomed to getting up," said Rina; "it won't be at all too early for me."

"You must teach Molly to get up," said Peregrine.

"I do try to," protested Molly, "but it's impossible. I can't wake up."

"Our church here is only twenty-five years old," said Peregrine; "my father built it. There's a chapel at Stones, isn't there?"

"Yes—a lovely one," said Rina. "It's small and is attached to the house."

"I do hope young Mr. Proctor is a good practising Catholic in spite of all these wild stories we hear about him," said Lady Ellington with a touch of severity. "His father was such an excellent man, most devout and good."

"I should say that's about the last thing his son was likely to be," commented Peregrine dryly.

"What do you think about it, Rina?" inquired her aunt.

Rina shook her head.

"I don't think I was there long enough to judge. I didn't spend a Sunday there, you know."

"He didn't discuss the subject with you?" said Lady Ellington.

"He told me how much his ancestors had suffered for the Faith," said Rina.

Clearly she could not help it if she produced a wrong impression upon them of the absent Markham. There was indeed in her heart a very strong wish to counteract in some way the unfavorable opinion they all seemed to have of him. But she saw an expression of polite incredulity on the faces of Lady Ellington and her son that sufficed to tell her that her little effort had been unsuccessful.

She was glad when the somewhat protracted meal came to an end. There seemed to be so little to talk about except Stones and the inmates thereof, and in her present mood these were the last subjects Rina wished to discuss.

It was now quite apparent to her that if Lady Ellington had had a voice in the matter she would certainly never have been permitted to stay with the Proctors. Markham was labeled dangerous, and had they been in the least aware of his fascinating and attractive qualities their anxiety for Rina would have been increased a hundredfold.

"I did quite right to send for her," said Lady Ellington in private to Peregrine that night; "he had already insisted upon painting her portrait. I am afraid they were thrown very much together even in those few days, and Janet Proctor is not at all the kind of woman to make an adequate chap-

eron. But I do trust that dear Rina is perfectly indifferent to him."

"It struck me that she didn't care to talk about him," said Peregrine thoughtfully. "I tried her twice—once before dinner when we were alone. But perhaps it is her way to be reticent."

"Ah, very likely. Dear Helen was very reticent too," murmured Lady Ellington as she bestowed a good-night embrace upon her son.

CHAPTER XIV

THE April days passed very quietly and agreeably at Queen's Barn—a name which had been bestowed upon the property after an unforeseen visit from Queen Elizabeth, who had taken refuge in a neighboring barn during a heavy thunderstorm. The owner at that time had not been loyal to the old Faith, and he had been delighted at the honor—as he conceived it—of harboring the royal lady, and had commemorated the event by calling his house Queen's Barn.

It was an unusually fine and warm April that year, and everything was far more advanced in Hampshire than it had been upon the bleak and wind-swept Cotswolds. Larch groves displayed their wonderful frail emerald in bright mists of verdure, wild cherry trees decked in the white gossamer of their bridal array shone out amid their graver brethren of the woodland; in sheltered spots the daffodils and primroses made wild gardens of blossoming. The grass was pushing up already in the meadows down by the Test, whose silver ribbon cut so agreeably, like a curving sword, across their flat greenness.

The south windows looked across the terraces and lawns down to the river-meadows. On the north side of the garden there was a little copse of firs and silver birches, larches and beech-trees. Little paths ran enticingly into this fastness. Rina learned to prefer it to the garden. On sunny days she would go and sit there with a rug and a book, enjoying the open air freedom of life in the English country-side, while her cousins went off to play golf. Once they had insisted upon giving her a lesson, but Rina had no aptitude for the game and the attempt was laughingly admitted to be a failure. She begged them to leave her at home for the future. In the afternoons they often motored into Winchester, or to visit friends in the neighborhood, so as to let Rina see, as they expressed it, something of the country. And after tea if they were back in time she generally accompanied her aunt to rosary and Benediction in the little church. Peregrine and Molly were often too lazy to come.

Rina adapted herself well to the new life. There was a natural feeling of flatness during the first days, for Stones had been productive of strenuous excitement, and there was bound to be a reaction when Markham's presence had been wholly withdrawn from her life. She had heard nothing of him beyond the fact mentioned in Mrs. Proctor's letter written a few days after her departure, that he had returned to town on the Saturday afternoon. She had wondered a little if he would write to her, and once it occurred to her that she would have been very glad to get a letter from him. His silence produced a sense of unwillingly acknowledged disappointment.

She wrote long letters to her mother—letters that were almost photographic in their detail and showed a distinct contrast to the hurriedly executed

notes that were all she had found time for at Stones, when Markham claimed almost every moment of the day. In those first letters she had only once casually mentioned his name, and after that she had not again alluded to him. She wondered sometimes if her mother had noticed the omission in subsequent letters.

But here at Queen's Barn there was no cause for reticence, and she knew her mother would be delighted to hear every detail of her sister's home. Rina described everything, and was glad of the leisure that enabled her to write at such length.

Rina felt as if her present quiet life at Queen's Barn were in a sense a time of probation, a little space in which to pray and meditate and prepare for whatever the future might hold. It was perhaps for this reason that Lady Ellington found her so much more serious and grave than she had expected to find her; she even wondered why Helen had ever felt such keen anxiety about her daughter. She had been aware of that anxiety for some time past from certain things Helen had written in her letters. There had been, of course, that determined opposition to the marriage the old prince had proposed to arrange for her. There was evidence at least of obstinacy in that episode. But to outward appearance the girl possessed little of the heedlessness of youth; she was quiet, controlled, with pleasant, soft, reposeful ways. Lady Ellington was disappointed perhaps to find her so little of a companion for Molly. Their tastes were far apart, and they had been so differently brought up that Molly, who was the elder by two years, seemed quite childish beside her tall, grave, young cousin. In London, perhaps, they would find amusement in common, and the difference would be less marked. Rina would meet other girls, other young men.

And here Lady Ellington felt a very natural maternal misgiving. Rina was undoubtedly beautiful and perhaps few men would give a thought to Molly when she was in the room. And she was very anxious that Molly should marry; she did not want her to have her chances spoiled. She wished to bring about a marriage between her daughter and young Everard Grey. Last year there had been a certain friendliness between the two, and he was a college friend of Peregrine's, and had stayed at Queen's Barn for the shooting, at which he was even more of an expert than Peregrine himself.

Lady Ellington began to feel even before she went to London that if Everard were to see Rina, Molly's chances would be considerably reduced. For the affair was still at a very undeveloped stage, it might or might not become a formal engagement.

As a rule, Peregrine refused to accompany his mother and sister to town. He came up later for the more important cricket-matches, but for the rest of the time he preferred to remain in solitary state at Queen's Barn. But this year he suddenly announced a change of plans. It wasn't fair, he alleged, to his mother that she should have all the chaperoning of Molly on her hands. He would follow them in two or three days. Lady Ellington was very much astonished, for she had long ago relinquished entreating him to accompany them. If it ever passed through her mind that the presence of Rina had something to do with the change, she prudently kept silence on the point. There was no doubt that he admired his cousin immensely, and she accepted his homage like a young queen.

No one at Queen's Barn guessed the preoccupation of Rina's mind in the days that immediately preceded their departure for town. She entered into all their plans and preparations, gave Molly

advice about her clothes, and helped her aunt in numberless ways, for Lady Ellington was utterly unmethodical and left everything to the last moment, when she found herself in a perfect sea of confusion. It was a comfort to have Rina at hand, quietly capable, ready to write notes and arrange papers, and generally to reduce the prevailing chaos to order. Rina was even driven to wonder at times how her mother and aunt had contrived to grow up so utterly unlike each other in all the little things of life.

As the days had merged into weeks and the weeks had grown into a whole month and no word had come from Markham, Rina began to feel that the episode had been prudently closed. It had lost something of its bright reality and was merging itself into that dim realm of dreams and visions to which all beautiful memories must at last be consigned. When she had left Stones steeped in the glamour of it all, she had never imagined the immediate future would hold this dull blank of silence. She had no choice but to bear it patiently. Yet always she had the feeling that once in London the silence would be broken. Markham would write or come. It was he who had shown such eagerness to see her there. It did not occur to her that he would have forgotten, but she did force herself to believe during those quiet weeks at Queen's Barn that something of his first ardor had passed away, and that the separation had diminished the slight attraction she had had for him. But when the Ellingtons had been settled for nearly three weeks in Prince's Gate (their arrival having been duly announced in the "Morning Post," to Rina's secret relief), and still Markham had given no sign, she began to believe that his mother had been right and that Adrian Guise was using his influence to

keep them apart. It was much easier—much less heart-breaking—to believe this than to think for a moment that Markham, capricious and inconstant, had forgotten her.

Nevertheless, she suffered in London more than she had ever done at Queen's Barn. The life, too, exhausted her, for although the Ellingtons did not rush from morning to night like so many people, they did quite enough in the way of parties and plays to tire the unaccustomed Rina almost to death. She grew pale and languid from the late hours, and was astonished to see that Molly retained all her pink freshness in spite of them. June was a hot month in London that year, and although Rina was used to far greater heat in Florence she felt the airlessness, the oppressive atmosphere of the great city more than she had ever felt those shining Italian summers.

She hid successfully from them all the fact that anything was wrong, and even to herself she would not envisage or measure what the eventual defection of Markham might mean to her in the future. His prolonged absence, his continued silence, seemed to take the zest out of her life, and she wondered sometimes if the crystallization of such conditions would make them in time more easy to bear. Pride did its duty, wielding from time to time its little, merciless scourge, but there were moments when it had no effect upon her at all, when her very physical vitality was quenched and diminished by the belief that Markham had never cared for her in the least. That pretence of ardor had been part of his gay, gallant charm that had played such havoc with her young, untried susceptibility.

They met at last when to neither of them a meeting seemed at all probable, and when both were

unprepared for it and consequently off their guard. Rina was leaving the Oratory after the ten o'clock Mass one week-day morning when she saw Markham standing on the wide, low, gray steps. Their eyes met, and it would have been difficult to say who had had the advantage of the first glimpse, so simultaneous did that mutual regard seem. Rina had been to the opera the night before, she had gone to bed late and found it impossible to rise in time to go to an early Mass. Even when she left the house no one but the servants had stirred. She had gone out almost unobserved and had walked to the Oratory. Perhaps she had never less expected to see Markham than at that moment, and she was able to recognize her own immense relief to feel that the meeting had not taken place under the critical, if kindly, eyes of her aunt and cousins. She had always dreaded seeing Markham again under such circumstances, had always feared that her self-control might ever so little fail her, that she should not be able to keep something of her intense joy from showing in her eyes.

She greeted him with a gravity that gave him no least hint of all that was so tumultuously passing in her mind. He read no pleasure, no astonishment, in her face. When she held out her hand it seemed to them both almost as if they were meeting as strangers. His long silence lay between them heavily, a tangible barrier.

Markham was dressed with a kind of studied, expensive carelessness. His rather bright blue tie emphasized the blueness of his bold, wide-open eyes. His gray flannel suit and straw hat looked a little strange to her after Peregrine's *soigné* London garb, but she quickly recognized that he had a graceful lithe look utterly denied to her cousin.

"How long have you been in town?" he asked,

still standing in front of her. Most of the congregation had already left the church and the little groups of people had melted away almost as quickly as they had emerged. Markham and Rina were almost alone, although so close to them moved and stirred the busy, endless traffic of the Brompton Road.

"Nearly three weeks," said Rina.

"You never told me."

"You never asked."

"You said in May—that was so vague."

"And now we are in June," she said.

She felt cheated when she thought of those beautiful spring days.

"You must not blame me," said Markham, "and yet I suppose I am to blame."

They walked down the steps side by side and into the Brompton Road. Rina turned in the direction of the Victoria and Albert Museum, its pinkish mass outlined delicately against the pure bright blue of the sky. All of a sudden she thought how beautiful London was. It had never seemed beautiful to her before. She had often wondered why Markham, who was an artist, should persist in living there.

He walked by her side. "Where are you going?"

"Back to my aunt's house."

"It's the Park end; isn't it?"

"It faces the Park," said Rina.

"I'll come with you."

Although she felt the imprudence of walking with Markham even that short distance, she found herself unable to remonstrate. There was always a risk of meeting Peregrine or perhaps Lady Ellington. And what would they say—what would they think—if they met her walking with a strange young man?

They would question her only to find it was Markham Proctor.

Tall and well-matched in height, they made a conspicuous couple. Both were more than ordinarily good-looking, and Rina in her thin, dark blue summer dress with a broad, shady hat of dark blue straw, was a girl few people would pass without a second glance. She always looked most beautiful when she was at all animated, and Markham's sudden appearance had filled her with the warm little glow of excitement she had known in those days at Stones.

Markham, proud perhaps of his companion, flung his head back and walked with easy, swinging strides.

"We might go in the Park for a little," he suggested.

"No—there isn't time," said Rina.

"What nonsense—of course there's time," said Markham. "You can't be doing anything of greater importance this morning."

Rina felt the truth of this; she knew that she was going to yield to his will in the matter. Now that the meeting had actually occurred he was evidently determined that it should not be cut short. Perhaps he had some explanation to give her for that silence, that avoidance of her. Something that perhaps would take the sting from the memory of those forlorn weeks.

"You know I've thought of you a great deal, Donna Rina," he said at last, looking down at her with a smile.

"Have you?"

"Did you wonder because I never came to see you?"

"I was a little surprised," said Rina, "you used to talk of it, you see."

"You made one great mistake," said Markham, looking straight in front of him. "You took my mother's part."

"I did nothing of the kind!" said Rina indignantly.

"Oh, yes you did. About Adrian Guise—"

"I only told you just what I thought. That such a friendship for you was dangerous."

"Well, it's a great pity you took up that attitude. You made me feel, you see, as if I had to choose between you and my friend."

He did not look at Rina, perhaps he did not dare. But there was emotion in his voice, and the knowledge gave her a thrill of hope.

Rina turned her face toward him; she looked up at him and saw that he was very white and that his eyes were blazing.

"There was not the slightest need for you to make any choice," she said coldly.

"Oh, but I think there was," said Markham. "You see, he's my friend; I'm very fond of both him and his wife—their house is a second home to me."

"It can't matter, then, to you what I think about it," said Rina.

Now she knew that she was wilfully blinding herself. But his silence, his unwillingness to come see her or write to her, had led her to form the bitter conclusion that she had been mistaken in believing that he had cared for her in the least. And this was not the moment, filled full of the emotion at seeing him again, of listening to his voice, of hearing his reproaches, to search too closely into her own heart and find how deep the wound had gone.

There was a pause. They had reached the top of Prince's Gate and for a moment Rina hesitated.

"Nonsense—of course you must come. We can

talk better there. The thought of your aunt's house scares me to-day!" He was smiling again.

Rina gave one glance in the direction of Lady Ellington's house, to which even then conscience was inviting her to return. Then without a word she crossed the road by Markham's side; they entered the Park together. They walked westward and before they came to Kensington Gardens Markham possessed himself of two chairs, and they sat down under the shade of some giant trees.

She had neither the wish nor the courage to forego the interview; it was the inevitable sequence to those days at Stones. And she might never see Markham again; he had a trick of vanishing. She felt as if invisible but powerful hands were trying to drag him away from her, and that but for this fortuitous encounter they might never have seen each other again. She rememberd that Mrs. Proctor had said Adrian Guise would be certain to intervene between them if he remotely suspected any attachment on Markham's part. She could believe it now; she had never quite believed it before. But his words had revealed to her that there had been a struggle of some kind. She had a right to this one interview; all the disapproving aunts and cousins in the world should not deprive her of it!

"I want to explain to you that it does matter very much what you think about it," said Markham in a hard tone. "I want to tell you *how much* it matters," he added with an emphasis that was almost violent.

Rina's heart beat quickly. She was convinced that whatever Markham had to say, it was something that did very passionately and vitally concern them both, their future, their very lives. She was curiously controlled now that the crisis had come, even though Markham sat there looking at her

with devouring eyes. All that bitter doubt had been swept away; she could never again believe in his indifference. This thought gave her a strange and very beautiful sense of peace; she felt the protection of sheltering wings.

Markham told himself that she was looking more beautiful than any effort of his imagination had been able to paint her. He had never pictured himself as a very humble lover, but something of the lover's humility and fear came over him now as he looked at her. She seemed so far out of his reach —this girl whom he had once fancifully visualized as emerging from a stately Renaissance palace in stormy medieval days of love and war.

"I love you. I want you to be my wife. Isn't *that* sufficient reason?" he flung at her with impetuous passion.

"I suppose—some people would consider it so," she parried breathlessly.

She had never imagined that matters would rush to so hasty a crisis as this. It is true that once she had believed that Markham would some day come to her with words of love on his lips. She had meditated upon her probable answer; she had honestly tried to examine whether such a marriage would be likely to prove a prudent or a happy one, and she had felt vaguely that her mother would not readily approve of it. And then she had read indifference in his continued silence; hopes and fears and scruples had alike vanished in that sea of bewildering pain that had invaded her heart.

"What have you to say to me, Rina?"

It was the first time he had called her thus by her name without any prefix.

Rina was digging patterns on the path with the tip of her parasol. She pushed the little heaps of dust this way and that, apparently absorbed in this

trivial, absurd occupation. It was so difficult to make a clean line of any depth, always the dust came trickling back. Suddenly Markham snatched the sunshade out of her hand, for a moment she thought he meant to break it in two.

"I insist upon your telling me. You shall not torture me any more!"

"What do you want to know?" she asked patiently.

"If you will marry me!"

"In spite of my disapproval of your friendship?"

"Oh, if that's all, you'll learn to like Adrian and his wife. You could try to like them—for my sake!"

But though he spoke with all his old assured carelessness he knew in his heart that it was perfectly impossible for Rina, brought up as she had been, to accept these friends of his. She would indeed find it more possible to accept Adrian than his wife. Mrs. Guise was what is known as an advanced woman; she was absolutely destitute of religious beliefs; she disdained "man-made" laws of morality; she was sincerely and bitterly opposed to all social conventions. But she was not of a wild and lawless temperament; she was, on the contrary, coldly intellectual. She was rather plain, not unattractive, older than Adrian. From the day of their marriage in a Catholic Church (how she had scorned herself for submitting to that ceremony, which he had not then been sufficiently emancipated to forego!) she had with deadly decision set herself to the task of destroying the faith that was in him. She wanted, as she expressed it, to set him free. Now after eight yars her success was complete. One of the results had been the public acknowledgement of the authorship of "The Chessboard." Markham knew enough of this spiritual

tragedy to realize that there was no meeting-place for Adelaide Guise and the woman he desired to marry.

"You want me to be your wife," said Rina. "Do you care for me enough to give up this friendship?"

Her voice was cold and steady. Instinctively she knew that she had struck her first blow in the conflict. She remembered Mrs. Proctor's words and how ardently she had wished for their marriage, and there was born within her heart a passionate desire to save Markham. She loved him—how much she was only now beginning to envisage. If she were destined to return to Florence free, only she would know the depths of her bankruptcy.

Yet it lay with him to make the path smooth and clear.

"You mean that?" he said.

"Yes. I can see no other way."

"Why should you judge him so rashly—so hastily?"

There was anger in his tone.

"Can you tell me that I am wrong in my judgment?"

"Is this my mother's doing?"

"You told me much more than your mother did." She made a movement as if to rise, but he laid a firm, masterful hand on her knee. "May I have my sunshade, please?"

"No, you may not! Rina, why do you torture me? I love you—I have been thinking of you day and night ever since you left Stones. I've been longing to see you—yet I dared not. I was afraid."

"But Mr. Guise kept you away," she said.

She half regretted the words as soon as she had uttered them; they had slipped out almost involuntarily. The arrow had hit the mark. His face reddened.

"Why should he keep me away? What makes you think that?"

"I only asked if he did."

"But what in Heaven's name makes you suppose such a thing?"

"One has instincts," said Rina. "And then—you never came to see me."

"I was afraid of what you might say."

"Or of what he might say."

"Don't—don't," said Markham, with almost a groan.

He put his hands up to his face as if to shut out the so disquieting vision of her. Slowly, surely, with invincible, delicate skill, she was probing to the very heart of his procrastination, his delay. Was she doing this purposely? She had seemed very young, unversed, timid, when she had come to his mother's house. Now she was infinitely subtle, or so he felt her to be. He felt the force of her, almost as if he were engaged in a physical struggle with her.

She was pitying him now, aware that she had put his love to a sharp test. But it was for her own sake as well as for his. Their very future was at stake. She was fighting for her own happiness.

Aware that she had hurt him she stretched out her hand timidly and laid it upon his. Through her thin suède glove he felt that it trembled.

"Listen to me," she said; "you are a Catholic. In your house are old and proud traditions—you have told me so yourself. And for that very reason these Guises are dangerous companions for you. You have told me that Mr. Guise does not go to Catholic houses any more—that he isn't received by people who are strict and *bien-pensant*. He has tried in the past to alienate you from your mother.

If I married you he might try to alienate you from me!"

Out of the confusion of her thoughts she was trying to detach a few salient facts such as these—she was trying to show him how this friendship of his affected them both so terribly, so tragically.

"He couldn't be such a cad!" said Markham indignantly.

"Please forgive me if I have made the conditions too hard. You can always refuse to accept them, you know." She spoke more gently, but she took her hand away from his.

"But do you love me? You haven't told me yet! Enough, I mean, supposing there were no complications—to marry me?" His eyes were almost haggard.

"Yes," said Rina.

She spoke so low that she wondered if he had heard. He sat there quite still, his face set as a mask, a white tragic mask. Then he sprang to his feet; his whole countenance changed; he was once more the gay, debonair boy.

"*Dear*, dear Rina—do you mean it?"

"Didn't you know?" she said. "Didn't you ever guess? I was afraid I had shown it so plainly!"

It was a relief to be able to laugh, to relieve the tension a little. There was no one in sight, though it is doubtful if the presence of unknown onlookers would have stayed Markham in his purpose then. He came close to Rina's chair, and stooping down he kissed her. In that long clinging of his lips to hers Rina knew that love had indeed come, an overwhelming flood as of many waters, into her life. It had come to her as once it had come to her mother. She felt then as if all her life, its accumulation of hours and days and years, had been leading her inexorably toward this one point.

"Markham—Markham!" she said when he released her, gazing up into his face with eyes softened and tender.

And with her triumph she tasted that second victory which was assuredly hers. She had won the first point in the supreme contest against the adversary, Adrian Guise.

"I'll do whatever you wish," he said brokenly; "I'll make any promise. Nothing matters if you will be my wife. My life is in your hands, Rina. I have chosen."

His blue eyes were swimming with tears.

CHAPTER XV

MARKHAM and Rina walked back as far as the gates of the Park together. No, he must not come to see her, she said, until she had made things quite clear to her aunt. Then she would write. This meeting, this irregular interview, so at war with all the Florentine rules of conduct and notions of conventionality, was to be the last as well as the first. Proud and sincere, she determined that everything should be above-board. Markham, fearing as well he might, that there would prove to be unforeseen rocks ahead, pleaded in vain for a few more delicious secret meetings. Rina would not hear of it. He chafed against this absurd, old-fashioned prudence, but Rina was in complete mastery of the situation.

"I will tell Aunt Theresa as soon as I possibly can. But you must wait until I write—it's so difficult to find her alone."

"Why are you beginning by making things unnecessarily difficult and complicated?" he said sulk-

ily. "If we are engaged I have a right to come to see you."

"I want to avoid difficulties and complications for the future. Shall I tell you what I should really like you to do?"

"Something impossible, I'm sure." His sigh was almost a groan. Rina laughed.

"Don't be tragic," she said lightly. "It's something very easy. I'd like you to go down to Stones this very day and tell your mother."

"Oh, I'll write to her. The old lady'll be delighted—she'll purr over us both. But when I go you must come. I shouldn't dream of leaving town till I've seen you again."

"I should like her to know as soon as possible," said Rina, feeling that in Mrs. Proctor she would find a most powerful future ally.

"But I've said I would write to her—she'll get the letter to-morrow morning. When shall we be married, Rina? I should hate a long engagement; besides, there is nothing to wait for. We are surely old enough to know our own minds. I feel as if it would kill me to wait!"

"Oh, I'm sure we can't be married for ages," said Rina. "I shall have to go home."

"Leave England? Oh, Rina—I simply couldn't let you!" His face was dismayed.

"Silly boy—of course I must go back to my mother. Now be good and go down to Stones. Yes—you may write to me if you wish. Dear Markham—" she put out her hand. They were nearing Prince's Gate. "Good-by—don't come any farther."

Her pale little face was very resolute.

"This is awful," said Markham, tragically. He felt as if he had never been so miserable in his life, although this surely should have been one of his

happiest moments. "Mayn't I come in and tell Lady Ellington myself?"

He stopped, determined to detain her if only for a few minutes.

"No—no—" she said hurriedly; "I must explain things to her."

To spring Markham as an accepted fiancé upon the astonished disapproval of Lady Ellington was a task too great for her courage.

"You talk as if every one were going to object," he said, beginning for the first time to take alarm.

She longed to say plainly, "Yes, but isn't that your own fault? Haven't you given these people cause to object?" But she dared not as she observed his expression of profound gloom.

"You do love me—you're quite sure?" he persisted, looking down at her face.

"Oh, Markham, I do, I'm sure," she answered with a little quiver in her voice.

He flung away from her then, abruptly disappearing down Ennismore Gardens. Rina walked quietly up to the house and rang the bell, sincerely hoping that that parting had been unobserved from the windows. She asked the footman if her aunt were in, and the man replied in the negative. Her ladyship had gone out late with Miss Mary and had ordered luncheon for two o'clock. It was now just twelve, and she was glad to think as she mounted the high, steep flights of stairs to her room on the fourth floor, that for the next two hours she could count upon being alone. She needed sorely that little time of complete solitude. It seemed so strange to think that in two hours her life could have been so completely changed. She had left the house that morning free, and feeling a little sad and disappointed in that freedom, but resolute in her determination to confront the future with a

courage that should give no hint of her secret hurt. Her thoughts had been full of Markham, and she saw now that her heart had even then been already wholly his. Now she was no longer free; she had put her life and her future in his hands. The thought gave her a little thrill of joy. She lived over again in imagination that beautiful passionate interview. She felt again Markham's touch, his kiss, that seemed as a seal upon their mutual promise of love. She seemed to love him the more for that waiting, that bitter little delay that had taught her how dear he was.

When her excitement had subsided a little, she saw that she was face to face with a very difficult situation. All those old difficulties which she had flung to the winds when Markham was actually present, returned to her now with redoubled force, presenting nightmare barriers of insuperable complications. Lady Ellington's disapproval would certainly manifest itself at the outset. It would be a foretaste perhaps of her mother's very definite antagonism to such a marriage for her only daughter. And in that possibility there was indeed something which Rina actually feared, because she saw in it a deadly antagonism which might separate herself from Markham. Had she been too hasty in accepting that love when it was offered to her? Perhaps she ought to have waited before she promised to marry him. She should have deferred making any answer to his impetuous wooing until she had consulted her guardians—her mother and the old prince. But love had swept prudence for the moment completely out of sight. It was only now that reason returned to rebuke, to remonstrate—reason supported by conscience, a formidable alliance. Like all other Catholics, Rina had been trained to that daily examination of conscience which

so stimulates its subtle activities. Its tardy counsels descended upon her now with stinging force like a succession of little lashes. She was a little ashamed. The adventure had lost something of its glory. Even the fact of that ardent embrace, bestowed upon her in a public park for any chance spectator to watch, came back to her sobered mind with a sense of shame that made her face burn.

If her mother could have seen it—if the old prince could have seen it! . . . Would Markham think the less of her because of her easy submission to that kiss? She found excuses for herself in those past weeks of starvation, of delay. The sight of him had weakened her. She had so longed to hear words of love from his lips that when they came she could not but listen. And now the hard part lay in front of her. For it was going to be hard and thorny. Rina never deceived herself at all upon that point.

It was a very subdued Rina that went down to luncheon that day. Lady Ellington was present with her son and daughter and Mr. Everard Grey. This young man, who was of a dark, austere type, at first talked chiefly to his hostess, but his eyes rested fully as often upon Rina as they did upon Molly, who was slightly self-conscious in his presence.

Rina was still a little flushed, an unusual thing for her, and her eyes were very bright. The excitement subdued in her heart had not faded from her face. This gave her a brilliant, animated appearance, and by contrast Molly looked more commonplace than usual, her prettiness more obvious if more unsophisticated. Presently Mr. Grey began to talk to Rina, who was sitting opposite to him, about pictures, and especially those of the Italian galleries. He knew Florence very well; he remem-

bered what he had seen and perhaps purposely he had chosen a subject which he felt might interest her and draw her out. Rina's education in matters of Tuscan art had been unusually complete, and her grandfather had always insisted that she should have a thorough and exhaustive knowledge of her native city. She made an effort to answer Mr. Grey, although her thoughts were so full of other things, but this fact served to detach her from her present surroundings so that she talked a little more than usual. The conversation, such as it was, became almost a duologue.

"I shall certainly make another trip to Florence and go through Umbria, too, next spring," said Mr. Grey; "there's so much written now it's quite bewildering. The only way is to get one's knowledge first hand, and go and look for oneself." His melancholy eyes fastened themselves upon Rina. "I suppose you speak Italian?—mine is very faulty," he added.

"Of course I speak it—it is my own language. You forget I am an Italian," said Rina, laughing.

"It's a beautiful language," he said. "When I hear people speaking it in the street I feel quite homesick—I feel I must take the first boat and go off straight to the south and look at the sun shining on the olive-trees again."

He looked almost with envy at Rina as at a being unimaginably privileged. Molly, who could meet him on the golf-links upon terms of perfect equality and comradeship, began to feel herself a little left out in the cold. But she was too warm-hearted and generous to be jealous. Rina was looking glorious to-day, she told herself; no wonder Everard should find pleasure in talking to her. She had always known he was what she called "mad about Italy."

"Were you out this morning, my dear?" inquired Lady Ellington, turning to Rina in a brief lull in the conversation.

"Yes, I went out about half-past nine. I went to the Oratory."

"Good girl—I was still asleep," said Molly smiling.

"Did you go anywhere afterward? You were still out, I was told, when I came down. It was such a lovely morning," continued Lady Ellington in her usual disjointed fashion.

"I—I went in the Park," said Rina, alarmed by the sudden questioning, and sincerely wishing that she might have continued the discussion of Italian galleries until the end of luncheon.

"In the Park? Alone. Oh, you should never have gone there alone—you should have come back first for Molly."

Rina was silent; she colored a little, and her aunt immediately imagined that she resented the rebuke.

"I hope you did not go far?"

"Not very far."

"My sisters always walk alone when they want to," said Everard with sudden energy. "That sort of thing's going out."

He felt a desire to defend Rina, although he could not but perceive the undesirability of a girl of such conspicuous height and beauty walking about London alone, especially as she must be entirely unaccustomed to going thus unchaperoned.

"My niece is such a stranger to London," objected Lady Ellington.

Rina gave the young man a swift and grateful glance for his courageous intervention. It made him wonder why he had been so slow in coming to Prince's Gate to see for himself this lovely young

cousin whom Molly had so enthusiastically and generously praised.

Even Peregrine had told him she was good-looking, although he had added: "But my dear chap, you know she's lived all her life in a benighted palace in Florence, and she doesn't know one end of a cleek from the other!"

Still, even if her ignorance of golf was as great as they said, she knew quite enough about her own city to talk with a charming and simple intelligence of its wonders. Vague plans floated before his eyes, and he saw himself discussing the subject anew with her next spring, in dim old Tuscan churches and splendid, opulent galleries.

Everard, who could ride and shoot fully as well as Peregrine, had a deep love for books and traveling, which his friend utterly lacked.

"By the way," he said, turning suddenly to Peregrine, "do you know Proctor? Or had he left Forthaven before you came? He's got a decent portrait or two in the Academy this year."

"I don't know him," said Peregrine, stiffening a little. He looked sharply at Rina. "My cousin does, though—she's been staying at Stones lately."

"He's a very promising artist—didn't you think so?" said Grey almost eagerly to Rina. There was a subtle flattery in his tone as if he considered her opinion well worth having.

"I had very little opportunity of judging. He keeps his work in London. He did paint my portrait."

Rina spoke with studied indifference. The whole of her strong will was concentrated then upon hiding the agitation, the embarrassing confusion, caused by the unexpected mention of Markham's name. It was like a blundering intrusion upon her privacy.

"You ought to go and look at his Academy pic-

tures," said Everard, entirely oblivious of the fact that the subject under discussion was extremely disagreeable to more than one of the persons present. "Can't we fix a day, Lady Ellington? We might go earlyish one morning—there is less crowd then."

"Oh, I dare say we could arrange it," said Lady Ellington without enthusiasm. "But I'm sure my niece won't think Mr. Proctor's pictures worth looking at after the old masters. Besides, I have been told he is a very odd young man indeed. My sister and his mother were at school together, but I never liked Rina's staying at Stones."

"A bit mad, perhaps, but no harm in him," said Grey. "Quite a good sort in his way. I dare say you discovered that, Donna Rina? I think myself he's one of our coming men."

"He is a great anxiety to his poor mother," said Lady Ellington. "That is really all I know about him, and it isn't much to his credit, I am afraid." She sighed and looked mournful.

"Well, of course she doesn't like his being so intimate with the Adrian Guises," said Grey reflectively. "All Catholics look with suspicion upon them, and naturally Mrs. Proctor objects to his going there so much." His tone was commendably impartial. "I dare say it has led to some domestic squabbling. Markham is a man who likes his own way."

Yes, that was how the world judged him. As she listened, Rina felt it was intolerable that she should have to sit there and listen to the discussion, not at all to his advantage, of the man she had that very day promised to marry. She longed to defend him. Her very silence seemed to her a kind of subtle disloyalty. There was a moment when she thought she would have to defy all the counsels

of prudence, and utter the truth before them all and say: "I am engaged to Markham Proctor!"

She had begun to realize how very small is a certain section of Catholic society in England. Much intermarried, with innumerable ramifications and connections, it was scarcely possible for its members to avoid this kind of intimate konwledge of persons perhaps individually unknown. Markham's friendship for the Guises was so notorious a thing that a mention of him almost included an allusion to that unfortunate intimacy. It made him an object not exactly of suspicion but certainly of inquiry. It was felt that a young man could not frequent such a house, and meet the very advanced and clever men and women who associated with Adrian and his wife—people whose views for the most part were accessible through their writings—and not absorb something of their very un-Catholic outlook. And that this was a cause of very great dissension between Markham and his mother was well known. Even the most charitable of his critics were forced to admit that this unwise friendship might result in the total loss of the young man's faith. It was not as yet said that Markham was careless about his religion, but Adrian's influence could not but be fraught with danger to a young man of his type, gay, volatile, and impressionable. That was the world's opinion, and Rina did not deny that it was a fair and equitable judgment of the position, absolutely justified by the circumstances. But was she not going to save him? Had he not promised the renunciation she demanded of him that very day? He accepted the harshness of this decision in exchange for her love, which was all that mattered to him now.

"Rina's the only one that can really tell us anything about him," said Molly in her clear, young

voice. She smiled suddenly at her cousin in a challenging way, as if she suspected a hidden intrigue. "And she won't tell us!"

"She's eaten their salt, you see," said Grey. It seemed that he was bent on subtly defending Rina to-day.

"Ah, that was a great mistake," said Lady Ellington, who had been longing to enlarge upon this very point, and now laid down the law in that mild, unanswerable way which it was so impossible to contradict. "I am sure that my sister would never have permitted her to go to Stones if she had been in possession of all the facts."

"Then I can't help feeling glad that she wasn't," said Everard smiling. "It would have been a thousand pities for Donna Rina to miss seeing Stones. It's one of our oldest Catholic houses, and is architecturally interesting too."

"My going there was just a chance," explained Rina; "you see I traveled to England with Mrs. Proctor."

"She ought to be a capable traveler," said Everard; "I never met any one who knew so much about hotels."

"Ah, it's a pity she goes abroad so much—she must begin to regret it now," said Lady Ellington. "With a mother abroad for five or six months in the year, a young man is almost bound to make undesirable acquaintances."

She could reflect with complacency that the maternal eye had never thus been removed from the observance of Peregrine and Molly. There had always been for them that gently admonishing presence.

The meal which had begun so pleasantly had by this time developed into a long-drawn-out torture for Rina. She wondered when it would come to an

end, or at least when they would cease talking about Markham. It is certain that if one person present dreads the mention of a particular topic, that topic is bound to be discussed, as if the tormenting fear itself produced wireless messages that brought the subject violently to the minds of those present. So far it is true the girl had kept her head. Her nerves were under control. She had been far too highly trained to utter a single imprudent word. Even Molly's teasing challenge evoked no indiscretion of speech. She felt almost like an onlooker. There was a drama in progress, and she was playing a secret part in it. Markham absorbed all her thoughts. His vivid, passionate presence was far more real to her than these shadow people who discussed and condemned him.

She knew that he was surrounded by problems at once enigmatic and perplexing. But one thing was clear. He loved her and he had brought this great mystery of love into her life. She had the feeling that if he had not done so it would have passed her by. Perhaps she was like her mother—she could only love once. And it was as Toni had said—one felt it would be easy to die for the beloved. . . .

But soon, very soon, she must find courage to tell Lady Ellington of her engagement. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

THE opportunity at once desired and feared did not immediately present itself, for Lady Ellington had an unusual number of engagements that afternoon. It was always a matter of some difficulty to find her alone even when she was in the

house, for Molly and her mother were practically inseparable. They motored down to Ranelagh that afternoon, as Peregrine wished to see a polo match that was in progress. Everard Grey was to accompany them, and when Rina pleaded an excuse and said she would prefer to remain quietly at home, her aunt and cousins made no remonstrance. Grey was the only one who urged any reconsideration; he assured her the game was going to be a very good one, and if she had never seen polo played before she would be certain to enjoy it.

"Oh, we musn't let her tire herself," said Lady Ellington; "she is not used to our late hours, and we were at the opera last night."

She had her own reasons for preferring that Rina should remain behind; she had certainly monopolized Everard's attention all through luncheon; he had hardly said a word to Molly. Rina was quite unaware of these maternal hopes and fears; she only knew that Grey had got on her nerves with his persistent introduction of Markham's name.

Rina heard them return about eight o'clock. Molly's room was next to hers, and she heard her enter it and call her maid. She herself was already dressed, for she had formulated the little plan beforehand. After waiting a few minutes, she slipped downstairs and knocked at her aunt's door.

"Who is it?" said Lady Ellington's voice.

"It's Rina. May I come in?"

The maid came to the door.

"Oh, come in, Rina," said her aunt, who was standing in the middle of the room taking off her hat. "Do you want anything?"

"Yes. I want to see you alone—quite alone for ten minutes."

Lady Ellington turned to her maid.

"You can go away, Benson, but come back the moment I ring. Yes, dear, what is it? I hope you haven't heard any bad news from Florence?"

"No, no," said Rina, "it isn't that. I have had no news, good or bad. But something has happened, and I want to tell you. I must tell you."

Lady Ellington felt alarmed; she had an instant presentment that she was going to hear something that she should not like.

"My dear Rina—you terrify me. What can it be?"

"When I came out of the Oratory this morning I met Mr. Proctor. We went into the Park together—"

"I thought you said that you went alone," interrupted Lady Ellington.

"No—it was you who said that I oughtn't to have gone alone," Rina reminded her.

"I am very sorry, indeed, to hear that you went with him. It does a girl no good to be seen about with Markham Proctor. But if that is all, you did quite right to tell me, though I think you are making far too much fuss about it."

She was relieved, and her relief coupled with a very real fatigue, combined to make her irritable.

"No, it isn't all," said Rina. "I'm coming to the important part. You see, he asked me to marry him."

"My dear Rina, do you really mean to tell me that Markham Proctor proposed to you in the Park?"

"Yes."

"I hope you sent him about his business," said Lady Ellington indignantly.

She looked very hard at her niece, and a sudden suspicion arose in her mind. Molly's careless words recurred to her forcibly. Had she not declared that

Rina was the only one who really knew anything about Markham, and she refused to talk about him? Was there any reason for this reticence?

"Rina—you don't mean—you can't mean . . . Helen would never forgive me!"

But Rina was coming toward her with her dark eyes full of a strange and happy light.

"Dear Aunt Theresa, won't you congratulate me? I'm engaged to Markham . . . and I'm so happy. I can hardly believe it's really true."

"It's impossible," said Lady Ellington sharply; "you'll never be allowed to marry him. Helen is sure to ask me what I know about him, and what can I tell her. What can I say? It is a calamity. I'm very sorry we discussed him at luncheon, but you heard what Mr. Grey said, and I am sure we were none of us uncharitable."

The indiscretion of that conversation was embarrassing to contemplate now. Rina ought to have given them a hint as to how matters stood. She must have known while she was at Stones that Markham was in love with her. Or had she been meeting him often in this secret way since she came to town, withholding the knowledge from them until he had made some definite declaration?

"Have you been meeting him often?" she asked, with what was for her an unusual measure of severity.

"You needn't ask me that, Aunt Theresa," said Rina proudly. "We had never seen each other since I left Stones until to-day. We had never exchanged a single word of correspondence. I have done nothing underhand, Aunt Theresa. Our meeting was an accident."

"Oh, my dear, of course I didn't mean to suggest that," said Lady Ellington, not thinking it would have been a matter of some difficulty to put a more

charitable construction upon her hasty words. "I am sure you wouldn't deceive me. But I can't help feeling distressed. I wish it hadn't happened under my roof."

"You are not to blame, Aunt Theresa," said Rina with a smile. "No one is to blame. But I don't want you to have too bad an opinion of Markham. He has promised me to give up those friends of his. And he *is* a good Catholic—I shouldn't like to marry a man who wasn't."

She bent down and kissed her aunt. At that moment she had an almost aching desire for sympathy.

"Oh, my dear, I fear you are being terribly deceived," said Lady Ellington. "Men will make all kinds of promises when they are in love and want to marry a woman. You mustn't let yourself put too much reliance upon Mr. Proctor's promises. He is not a boy, and his character is formed."

"I can trust him," said Rina, in a low, very tender voice.

"Well, well, we mustn't say anything about it yet —not till we have heard from your mother. Did you write and tell her?"

"Yes; I sent the letter this afternoon. That was why I wished to stay at home. I couldn't settle to anything until I had written to tell her."

"You mustn't imagine that you'll be allowed to marry him," said Lady Ellington. "Your mother will never allow it."

"But I mean to marry him," said Rina with quiet decision. "I am sure mother will never refuse anything unreasonably. She must see Markham and judge for herself. I suppose I shall have to be thinking of going home soon. I shall be sorry to go away—to leave England."

"Perhaps your home will be in England in the

future," said her aunt, the worldly aspect of the case suddenly presenting itself to her with an almost unholy attractiveness. "Stones is a lovely property, and the Proctors are very rich people. It would be perfect from every point of view if one could only think that Markham Proctor was all that a Catholic ought to be. But I should never have allowed Molly to marry him!"

Although it was long past dinner time, she seemed disinclined to let Rina go.

"I wonder what Janet Proctor will say when she hears of it. Of course, all the money is hers—she needn't give Markham a penny unless she likes. Such a strange will—it was almost as if his poor father foresaw how his son would turn out."

"Mrs. Proctor will be pleased, I think. I believe she hoped it would happen when she asked me to Stones." Rina's face was very soft, as if her mind were dwelling upon delicious memories.

"I will tell Perry and Molly, but they must not say a word to any one yet," said Lady Ellington. "Now, my dear—I must really dress. Fortunately we have no one coming to dinner to-night, but Perry is so cross if we keep him waiting too long."

She kissed her niece, who, feeling herself dismissed, left the room. Lady Ellington's mind was so full of surprise of Rina's engagement that she could hardly bring herself to ring for her maid and proceed with the task of dressing. Yes, Rina was certainly looking very lovely to-night; the English air had given her color. On the whole, perhaps the wisest plan would be to let her go home without delay. When Lady Ellington made this reflection, it was not without a keen sense of the influence it would indubitably effect upon a side issue, for it would strengthen Molly's chances with Everard Grey, who had allowed Rina to absorb all his

attention at luncheon that day, and had talked of little else all the afternoon. One would not say that Rina flirted; she was too grave and sedate for that, but she was unquestionably attractive.

Markham was not likely to keep away from the house for any length of time. Naturally he would be eager to see Rina again and to be presented to her relations. But until Helen's answer came there must be no kind of formal engagement, and the affair would be awkwardly in abeyance; one could not treat it as an engagement, and yet it would be impossible to assume that there was nothing at all between them. Yes, it would be far simpler for Rina to return to Florence.

Lady Ellington was able to feel an almost unwilling admiration for the courage Rina had evidently shown in imposing those severe conditions upon Markham at the very outset. It showed that she was fully alive to the danger of that friendship with the Guises, and moreover was prepared to combat it. She did not minimize it nor allow her love to blind her on the point. But Helen—would she let her young daughter run such a risk? Lady Ellington knew what her own feelings would have been if Molly had come to her and told her that she was going to marry Markham Proctor. It would have broken her heart, and she would have left no stone unturned to put a stop to it. Only one could not compare the two girls. One would be soft and yielding, but the other had qualities that were powerful, even dominating. Lady Ellington was aware of that hidden force in Rina's character. It might be that she would succeed in reforming Markham. She might achieve what his mother's tears and prayers had failed to achieve. But was it right—could it be right—to let a young girl run so great a risk?

"I'm only thankful she didn't meet him at my

house," she thought to herself as she went downstairs to dinner. "Helen can't possibly hold me responsible, and after all she did let her go to Stones."

If any one were to blame, that person was most assuredly Mrs. Proctor, who had evidently engineered the whole thing. . . .

Her cousins congratulated Rina with that iced enthusiasm which she rightly judged would characterize all such expressions of sympathy. Once or twice she found herself wishing that Markham had been a man of whom every one spoke well, and of whom she might feel justifiably proud. It was a little humiliating to love a person who was considered so conspicuously beneath one's regard. There seemed a little conscious effort toward something degrading to stoop thus in one's love. Rina had a proud spirit; she felt it very keenly. If she had loved less she might have begun to regret her quick acceptance of that love so generally considered unworthy. But she loved too well. She would have foregone any friendship for that love. It seemed to her—on the human plane—the pearl of great price.

She did inflict upon herself a severe mortification, for she wrote no word to Markham and made no sign for five days after their tempestuous meeting. She awaited with a kind of disciplined patience the arrival of her mother's letter. Markham, on the contrary, wrote to her every day, sometimes twice a day. They were very wonderful letters in her eyes, and they seemed to renew day by day that burning flame of love in her heart. She read them over and over again; her eyes dwelling upon the words of love. She longed to answer them. It was not easy to let the days go by and make no sign. But she felt that it was something she owed to her

mother. Perhaps in the withdrawal there was a touch of expiation, as if she would make amends for that first rash promise to Markham, given before she had consulted her mother. If it hurt him, it hurt herself much more, this little, cold, patient effort of self-denial.

Helen's letter, when it came, was very guarded. "Of course," she wrote, "I must know more—a great deal more—before I can give my consent. I must know all that Theresa can find out about Markham Proctor. I felt that his mother had some cause for anxiety about him when she was in Florence, and I hope that it was nothing serious. Are you quite sure of your own feeling for him? You know him so little; you can hardly be said to know him at all. Many men of superficial attraction can arouse something that seems like love, especially in a young and untried girl. I have told your grandfather, and I wish I could say that he approved of the idea. But he is very angry, more, I think, at the idea of your wishing to marry an Englishman than for any other reason. He always hoped, too, that when your visit was over you would return here to marry Toni Delfini. Dear, dear Rina, you must not think I am against it. But I must see you —I must hear all you can tell me. Will you not come home, my dear?"

And in the meantime Helen would have received her sister's letter, whose contents Rina could imagine, although she had not read it. Not that she had ever had the slightest intention of keeping her mother in ignorance about Markham. She must know it all; that was part of the dreadful ordeal that lay in front of her. There were days when she awoke feeling unequal to the task. It was all made trebly difficult by the delay that was necessary before an answer from Florence could be received.

And every day came Markham's letters of renewed pitiful entreaty, letters that she read sometimes with scalding tears that had in them something of despair.

It never occurred to Rina that she could break with all the traditions of the past and by an act of open defiance marry Markham. She was not yet of age, and she was unaware that such a marriage could be legally solemnized in England. But it would not have been possible for her to contemplate such a course; her very Catholic training would have stood in the way. She was intensely loyal to her mother, and she could not forget that Helen had taken her part openly and determinedly at a very critical moment when her help had been of the utmost value. If she had been supine in leaving her only child so completely under the jurisdiction of the old prince she had made an act of reparation in that open espousal of Rina's cause in the affair of Toni Delfini. Rina realized that it could not have been easy for her mother to do this; a great effort must have been required to shake off that age-long tyranny. But now it would be far less easy for her mother to give her any support. Whatever Helen might do to avert this destiny for her daughter would have abundant justification in the facts of the case. Markham was not an ideal suitor; from the point of view of an anxious Catholic mother he could only be found lamentably wanting. His character would be described as weak and faulty, and he stood in the shadow of sinister influences. It is true that he had promised amends, but Helen might not unreasonably ask to see some tangible fulfilment of those promises before entrusting Rina to his care. They were both young; they could both wait a few months, even a year, so that Markham might give practical proof of his sincerity and pur-

pose of amendment. All this Rina was abundantly prepared to hear. She saw the cold wisdom and prudence of it. Yet she felt with all her youth that such waiting would be simply fatal to Markham. Disappointed and disheartened, he would undoubtedly turn to Guise for sympathy in the evil hour. And it would be Guise's opportunity to re-establish his dominion over him; to point out the uncharitable intolerence of Catholics in general and of Rina's relations in particular, to insist upon their bigotry, their narrow-mindedness. . . .

She saw that nothing could be done until she had returned to Florence and seen her mother. The sooner she started the better. She would be perfectly honest and frank with her. She would hide nothing. But she would make it clear that she was determined to marry Markham. She felt some relief when she had made this resolution; it seemed to settle automatically much that was difficult. She would start on the following night, and perhaps Lady Ellington would allow her to invite Markham to come and see her in the morning. She had not the courage for more than one interview with him until she could meet him as his acknowledged fiancée.

CHAPTER XVII

HAVING formed this resolution Rina went down to the drawing-room to inform her aunt, and discuss with her the plans for the journey. Lady Ellington had said she would be in to tea that day, and it was just five o'clock when Rina entered the room. She was astonished to find Everard Grey sitting there alone.

"Isn't Aunt Theresa here?" she said, feeling a little confused.

"No, I am waiting for her. She asked me to come and I was a little early."

"She went out with Molly," said Rina.

"I am glad to have this opportunity of—of speaking to you about your engagement," said Grey, fixing dark, melancholy eyes upon Rina.

"Thank you," said Rina. She had not noticed that his words contained no hint of congratulation; she imagined he was making the usual felicitations.

His next words contradicted this impression.

"I dare say people have been rather chary about congratulating you," he said.

She did not answer, but a little flush rose to her face, due much more to indignation than to embarrassment. Yet his quiet, serious manner precluded the idea of any insolent intention. She felt that in any case he had no right to discuss her enengagement in this intimate way with her.

"Do not be offended with me, Donna Rina," he said. "I have always liked Proctor, and now I think he is the most-to-be-envied man in all the world. But you," he put his head back and regarded her with dark, piercing eyes, "you will be simply throwing yourself away!"

Rina held her head arrogantly.

"I must ask you not to speak in this way to me," she said.

"I am speaking to you as a fellow-Catholic. If you marry him the danger to your own faith may be incalculable. You have never read any of Guise's books, I am sure, and I hope you may never do so. They are very subtle in their poison."

"I am not going to marry Mr. Guise," Rina reminded him.

Her heart sank as she listened to his words.

"No, but you are going to marry one of his most intimate friends. Frankly, your mother—your

guardians—should use every effort to prevent it."

"I am going back to Florence to-morrow," she said; "I shall keep nothing from my mother, I have no secrets from her. I intend to tell her all that I know of Markham." There was a proud, defensive ring in her tone.

He looked at her with a kind of pity. He had been on the brink of falling in love with her himself, and he had felt a certain cold disillusionment when he had been told of her engagement to Markham Proctor. The affair was a secret, and Lady Ellington had had her own reasons for instructing Grey on the point. But she would have been distressed had she known how innocent was his heart of any tenderness for her own daughter.

He had been violently attracted by Rina's unusual beauty as well as by her charm and intelligence. Then when this engagement came to his knowledge, he was aware of the presence of a little dust upon the idol. He was himself a very strict Catholic, and the thought that a girl so carefully trained and brought up in pious surroundings, and belonging, too, to one of the old Black families, should be permitted to marry a man like Markham Proctor filled him with a sense of dismay. From a worldly point of view it would be an excellent match for her; from a spiritual point of view it left everything to be desired.

"You are too young to understand the risk you would run in making such a marriage," he said abruptly.

Yes, that was certainly what they would all most justifiably tell her.

"That is a question for my mother to decide," she told him. "I think I should prefer not to discuss the matter with you, Mr. Grey."

He found even her little touch of arrogance en-

chanting. What had Markham done—what charm had he used—to gain the love of such a woman with such swift ease?

There were footsteps on the stairs, and Lady Ellington entered the room. She was not quite pleased to find Rina and Mr. Grey alone; she suspected the latter of having fallen a victim of her niece's undoubted charm.

"I've made up my mind to start to-morrow night if you will let me," said Rina, breaking an awkward silence. "Mother's written again—she seems to want me to go."

"Alone?" said Lady Ellington.

"Oh, I've done the journey once. With a sleeping compartment I shall manage all right."

"I can send a maid with you," said Lady Ellington, who was afraid that Everard might advance some objection to the scheme of her traveling alone.

"That would be perfect."

"But to-morrow—it's so soon. We shall be sorry to lose you—" Lady Ellington looked plaintive.

"Yes, I'm sorry too. But I think I ought to go."

Nothing more was said just then. Lady Ellington began to pour out tea and to talk to Grey. Then Peregrine and Molly came in, and the conversation became general. Rina had no fear now that Markham's name would inadvertently intrude; every one kept off that subject. She escaped as soon as she could to write a little note.

"Dear Markham:

"Will you come at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning? I want to see you, as I am starting for Florence in the evening. My mother wishes me to go home at once. And please understand that noth-

ing more can be settled until I have seen her. That is why I am starting immediately. Thank you for all your letters. You will have understood, I know, why I did not write.

"Yours, R. U."

She had never written to him before, and she made the letter as short as she could. She asked Lady Ellington if it might be sent by hand, and to this her aunt agreed. It would be more sure thus of reaching him. She made no demur about his coming on the following day; clearly Rina had the right to take farewell of him, and it would be impossible to prevent such a meeting.

Rina thought she could discern something of relief in all their three faces that night at dinner. It made her feel as if her visit had not been a success, almost as if she were going away in disgrace. She contrasted it involuntarily with all the expressions of regret, the entreaties for a speedy return, which had characterized her departure from Stones. The Ellingtons were obviously thankful to be relieved of the responsibility of her and her engagement. They were very kind, but they could not hide their disapproval.

Rina was living too much in her own thoughts and dreams just then to care very much for the slightly arctic atmosphere that surrounded her. To-morrow the little time of probation about which she had been so inexorable, would come to an end. She would see Markham.

When a servant came up to inform her on the following morning that Mr. Proctor was waiting for her in the drawing-room, Rina felt none of that trembling excitement which his sudden appearance outside the Oratory a week ago had produced. She was quite serene and self-possessed. She glanced

at herself in the mirror to see that she was perfectly tidy. She wore white to-day, partly because Markham had never seen her in white, and the day was very warm. To please him, she had tied a wide green ribbon round her waist; it was the one touch of color about her. Her face was very pale and quite emotionless. She went downstairs, meeting no one on the way, opened the door and entered the drawing-room. She saw Markham standing near one of the three big windows that overlooked the Park. His tall form was outlined against that space of subdued light. But he turned abruptly as she entered and came toward her. Even she was not quite prepared for the change in him; this strange subdual of all his customary buoyancy and gay charm. White, hollow-eyed, and nervous, he looked like a man who had been undergoing a long and slow agony of suspense.

"My dear, dear Rina," he said, and there was a sound in his throat that seemed like a suppressed sob.

His hands seized hers; they were dry and hot to her touch. She lifted her eyes and looked at him.

"Oh, Markham, don't please be so tragic," she said.

"I thought you had given me up," he said.

"Why couldn't you trust me?" She motioned him to a seat near the window, and sat down opposite to him.

"I can trust *you*. I can't trust these people who surround you!"

"What people?"

"Your aunt—your cousins—the whole bigoted set of them!"

"What are you afraid of? They can't tell me anything I don't know already."

"They can exaggerate—they can make you feel

I'm not the man to marry a girl brought up like yourself. And it is perfectly true, I am not! I have made promises, and they will tell you that I am not to be relied upon to fulfil them."

"Markham, do listen. It doesn't matter what they say here, though indeed they have been far kinder than you think. But I am going back to my mother, and I shall tell her everything."

"And if she's against it?"

"I don't think she will be."

"But if she is?" he persisted, in the tone of one who was determined to know the worst.

"Don't let us think of that," said Rina.

He looked at her with haggard, suffering eyes.

"I insist upon your answering, Rina. If she is opposed to it what do you mean to do?"

There was a little silence during which the stir of traffic in the road outside became suddenly audible. Rina turned her face away from Markham and looked out of the window near which she was sitting. She saw the traffic in the road below, the gliding, beautifully-appointed, sumptuous motors; the flashing, scarlet omnibuses grinding their impetuous way east and west, the throng of carts and carriages. Through the green foliage of the trees she could catch glimpses of the people riding in the Park, or walking under the shade of the trees. The June sunlight glorified everything; the emerald-colored sward looked very vivid, and the pale summer dresses of the women contributed touches of color that added to the charming effect of it all.

"In that case I should break off our engagement," said Rina at last.

Any other course of action would be impossible to her, but she did not believe that her mother would deliberately take away all hope of happiness from her.

Now his face almost frightened her with that look upon it, as of a stone mask lit by two blazing eyes. Only once had she seen that expression upon it before. With Markham it signified an emotion almost savage in its violence.

"You would break it off?" he repeated stupidly.

"Yes. If she thinks the risk's too great—"

"The risk?"

"To myself—to my faith. Nothing else can separate us—I can promise you that."

"Of course, this means that you don't love me at all," he said.

"You know that I love you."

"Yet you're ready to give me up at a word from your mother."

"Yes. She must decide."

"You don't, I suppose, care what becomes of me?"

"Yes, I shall care very much."

"You'd throw me back on the Guises—they are the only true and loyal friends I've got. You are afraid of their influence now, when there's no need to be afraid. But if I hadn't got you—" He broke off.

"Markham, don't ask me to think you are weaker even than I imagined."

"Weaker? When I haven't been near them all these days? I haven't said a word to them—I've kept absolutely clear of the whole set. The only person I've told is my mother—I went down to Stones the day before yesterday."

"What did your mother say?"

"She's more happy—more delighted—than I can tell you. She has written to your mother—you'll get a letter too."

"Oh, Markham, it must come right—it must!" she said.

He looked calmer then. "Are they so much against it here?"

"You see, they don't know you," said Rina evasively.

"If your mother gives her consent, when will you marry me?"

"Perhaps she will decide. You see, I'm not of age. And I like her to settle things. But I'm sure she won't want to keep us apart too long."

"Shall you like living at Stones always? You won't find it dull?"

"I am sure I shall love it," she said.

"Anyhow, we'll have a long honeymoon in Italy. That will be perfect!" His face brightened. There was hope—a pale, reluctant, timid ray, it is true—but it cheered him inexpressibly. He came a little nearer.

"I feel somehow as if you were slipping away from me. I can't picture you there any more. A gray old palace—or is it brown?—with a marble staircase and windows with iron bars. Thick, thick walls, and you looking so pathetically young in the midst of it all."

She laughed; his tragic tone awakened her sense of humor.

"Anyhow, my grandfather is a genuine antique," she said.

"What does he say about it? I suppose he has been told?"

"Yes—he knows. You can't expect him to like the idea, especially as it means my becoming English—my living in England. He always hoped I should come to my senses, as he calls it, and go home and marry Toni Delfini."

"Toni!" he repeated disdainfully.

"From their point of view he is ideal," she said. "That's what they won't be able to understand.

When I could have married and lived so near, and never lost touch."

"I am afraid of Toni! I am horribly jealous of Toni!"

"You need not be," she said quietly. Then she rose. "Markham, I'm going to send you away. I've so little time, and there's a lot to do."

"What time is your train? I insist upon coming to see you off."

"I'd rather you didn't. My cousins are to be there. Markham, be reasonable; say good-by to me now."

He wondered if she would let him kiss her. All this time he had not dared suggest such a thing; he felt almost afraid of Rina to-day. But at the thought of leaving her his courage returned.

"Rina, may I?"

She lifted her face. Markham put his lips to hers, drawing her to him with gentle force.

"Oh, my darling, you mustn't let any one separate us, not for all the reasons in the world."

"And you mustn't either," she reminded him gently.

"Guise!" he burst forth. "What is Guise to me now? I don't care if I never see him and Adelaide again. I want you—only you, Rina.

"And may I tell them that you have made that promise never to have anything more to do with them?" she said.

"Of course, you may. Can't you trust me?"

"Markham, it isn't for my sake only I'm asking it. It's for yours. If we marry, I want Stones to be again what it was in your father's time. Father Laurence told me about it."

"We could easily make it that," said Markham. "He told you then how different it used to be?"

"Yes," said Rina.

"I'm not the man my father was. He was a saint," said Markham.

"Without being saints we can make Stones what it used to be—a happy Catholic home."

"And you would like that?" he said, looking at her adoringly.

"Better than anything in the world. You see, it's yours."

Markham bent his head again and kissed her. "Darling, how beautiful your are," he murmured.

She moved toward the door. "I must go now. I'll write to you as soon as I possibly can. You will be good and patient?"

"Yes, yes," he said. "But you won't let the time be too long, will you? You've been a little cruel keeping me away all the week."

"Have I? There didn't seem anything else to be done—it was all so unsettled and confusing. You must forgive me. I felt it too."

She stood and watched him from the landing as he went downstairs. From the hall he looked back at her, and she waved her hand. It came into her mind to wonder then if she would ever be allowed to see him again, or whether with that exit he had gone out of her life forever.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was late at night when Rina re-entered the old Ubinaldi palace. She was very tired after her long journey, but even her fatigue did not quite suppress the feeling of strange, unusual excitement that possessed her. The old porter, grown white-haired in the service of his still more ancient master, was waiting up and the *portone* was already opened to admit her when the motor stopped. His *"Ben tor-*

nata, Eccellenza," pleased her with its friendly welcome, and she greeted him with a bright smile, for he was an old and valued friend. But her one thought was for her mother as she hurried up the long, wide flight of faintly-lit marble stairs, followed at some little distance by the sleepy maid who had been her rather useless traveling companion. The door at the top of the stairs was already opened, and Helen was standing there in the hall waiting for her.

Rina rushed up to her mother and flung her arms round her neck, kissing her almost with violence in her joy at seeing her again. Somehow her mother had never seemed so dear to her as she did after this separation of more than two months.

"My dear, dear child," said Helen tenderly. There were tears in her eyes. She had so dreaded to find her changed almost beyond recognition by all her recent experiences.

They went upstairs to Helen's own apartments, where some supper was waiting for Rina. They both sat down at the table. Helen poured out some red wine, and helped her daughter to some cold chicken and salad. The June night was very warm and still, and, though the great windows were wide open, no air came into the room.

"I want you to go to bed as soon as you have had your supper. We won't even begin to talk to-night, for if we do, we shall neither of us have any sleep."

Helen spoke in a tone of quiet decision that Rina could not help contrasting with Lady Ellington's querulous plaintiveness. She was relieved, too, at the proposed respite. She was much too tired to make a good case for Markham and herself to-night, for her head was full of the motion of the train, and and she was still giddy from the long hours of traveling.

Presently her mother said:

"Did you leave Theresa quite well?"

"Yes."

"And your cousins?"

"Yes," said Rina; "they sent all kinds of messages."

"I'm very glad to have you back. It was very strange here without you, Rina. I began to feel quite dull and old."

She looked at her daughter curiously, as if aware that she was subtly changed, as a woman is always changed by her first love affair. There was a new, exquisite softness, an added womanliness. And it had made her more beautiful, as the first touch of love so often does.

Rina smiled; she was too tired to speak much. And she did not feel like herself, at least not like the girl who had gone away scarcely two months ago. She was a stranger who had come back in the place of that girl who had departed light-heartedly, unaware of the destiny she was going so swiftly to meet. She had lived almost every hour of the time; it had been a highly emotional epoch for her, and she was feeling the reaction. She had emerged from it strained and nervous. To-night she wanted even to forget it a little. Surely the atmosphere of the old palace would envelop her once more with its quiet peace. Why should she have the depressing conviction that it would never be quite the same again? Was it because she had ceased in a sense to belong to it as completely as before?

Sleep came tardily, and then only in broken, almost feverish, intervals, full of the wildest dreams in which Markham and his mother, the Ellingtons, and even Mr. Grey, were heterogeneously mixed. She did not attempt to get up at the usual hour, and she was still in bed on the following morning when

Helen came into her room, fully dressed as if she were just going out.

In spite of her fatigue, Rina was looking very pretty with a little cap of the dainty Tuscan lace on her head, and wearing a wrap of ivory silk. She was very pale, and there were dark stains under her eyes.

Helen went up to her and kissed her. Then she sat down by the bed.

"Now tell me," she said; "tell me everything, Rina."

It was a long story, beginning with that very first evening at Stones. At one point in her story she stopped and said abruptly:

"Did you ever hear of a book called 'The Chessboard'?"

"Yes. It made a great stir some years ago. Of course, I did not read it. I was told the author was an apostate. Why do you ask?"

"Because it is Mr. Guise's work. He generally writes essays—this is his only novel, and he published it at first anonymously. Every one knows now that he wrote it. I saw it at Stones."

"I hope you didn't read it?" said Helen.

"I looked at the first few pages; then I found it was the kind of book you wouldn't like me to read. Mother—there were things against the Church in it—horrible things, sneering and untrue."

"I know the kind of things," said Helen, very gently.

She remembered the book well. Some of the characters were supposed to be portraits of well-known people in the Catholic world. It had created a little sensation when it first appeared, and had had a wide sale. For some years the author had remained hidden; he had not come forward into the limelight to claim the fame and praise that had

been meted out to him. It was only after Adrian's marriage that his wife had persuaded him to acknowledge the book as his own, "to make his position quite clear," as she told him.

"Mother, this man could only have a bad influence over Markham. But, thank God, he hasn't succeeded yet in harming his faith—he has still got that, although he is careless and negligent. And Mrs. Guise is what they call an advanced woman—she has no faith of any kind—she is opposed to all laws that are what she calls 'man-made.' She is against all codes of morality."

It was much worse than Helen had pictured, and her heart sank.

"Mother, I'm the only person that can save Markham. If he marries me he has promised me faithfully that he will have no more to do with them. He said he would try to make Stones what it was in his father's lifetime. He's been lonely, and his mother hasn't sympathized with his work." Her face glowed. "I *can* help him," she said.

"He made this promise?" asked Helen.

"Yes. You see I made it a condition that he should give them up. I told him so at the very beginning, before I said I would be his wife. He knows that it all depends upon that."

"But Rina, darling—Theresa said in her letter she would rather Molly should remain single all her life than marry Mr. Proctor."

"People are so unkind—so uncharitable. They calumniate him!" said Rina hotly.

"No, dear; there is no calumny. Be reasonable and look at it honestly. Here is a young man who for years has been the friend—even the intimate friend—of a very clever, unscrupulous, irreligious man. He has been listening to his words, reading his books, steeping himself in their poison.

has not yet actually destroyed his faith, but, as ou say, it has made him careless and negligent bout it. When his mother was in Florence I could ee that she was very unhappy about him, although he did not tell me why. And you think that you an undo the work of these past years—you think you can, as you say, save Markham. Oh, Rina dearest—you are such a child yourself! How do you know that he will keep his word? Men make all kinds of promises when they are in love and want to win a woman."

"I can trust him," said Rina. "When you have seen him, mother, you will think differently."

Yet even as she spoke she tried to visualize Markham here in the old place, sharing its quiet life as a son of the house, and the effort miserably failed. Try as she would to accomplish the feat she could only see him as a bright, exotic, alien, even unsympathetic presence. He would be gay and careless and charming with that very gaiety and charm she had found so attractive. But she had learned a little of what lay beneath it, and the knowledge hurt her. Nor could she see Markham side by side with the old prince. She tried to picture them, and could only produce an impression of disastrous contrast. The one with his antique dignity, his seigneurial manner, his frigid formality; the other careless and debonair with his tossing chestnut hair, his bold, laughing blue eyes, his utter absence of reverence and conventionality.

She saw Markham as her mother and the old prince would see him, clearly and impartially detached from all the glamour and allure that his personality held for her.

"Oh, mother, you must let me marry him! I love him so much."

"My dear Rina, it may be only a passing love—

a passing fancy. You know him so little. Eight weeks ago he was only a name to you."

Rina broke in almost violently:

"Didn't you fall in love like that yourself? How often had you seen my father before you learned to love him?"

Helen whitened.

"That was very different," she said. "Your father was a very good man, Rina. You could not have heard a word against him if you had questioned every one who knew him." There was a gentle reproof in her tone.

"Yes, but if he hadn't been a saint? Wouldn't you have loved him just the same? Wouldn't you have married him? Perhaps he would have been dearer even, if you had known he was unhappy—in danger—"

"Rina—Rina—what sort of a guardian should I be to his child if I let you make a marriage that might endanger your faith?"

"Mother, I'm not thinking of my faith so much as Markham's. I wish you could see Mrs. Proctor and talk to her about it. She spoke to me when I'd only been at Stones a few days. She said if he could only marry a woman who was a good Catholic—some one he really loved—and who could help him."

Helen felt an impulse of anger against Mrs. Proctor, and her carefully planned little intrigue which had had such swift results. That taking of Rina summarily to Stones without consulting any one; the subsequent throwing of the two young people together with the deliberate hope that Markham, susceptible, artistic, imaginative, might be attracted by the girl's beauty and fall in love with her. Yes, it all fitted together like the pieces of a puzzle. She had the feeling that Rina had been

sacrificed to a maternal egotism that had shown no mercy for its victim. Rina was to pluck the brand from the burning, and if she burned her own fingers in the attempt, what did that matter, so that the brand were duly plucked?

"Oh, Rina, why did I ever let you go to England!" she said mournfully.

"I have thought sometimes that I was sent on purpose, that I might see Markham and learn to care for him. If I hadn't traveled with Mrs. Proctor I should never have gone to Stones at all—I should never have seen him. To me it is like a beautiful plan!"

"Tell me just how matters stand between you," said Helen, stroking the girl's hand.

"We are engaged," said Rina. "I didn't say I would marry him till he'd promise to give up these friends; but I've told him I won't marry without your consent—that's what he's waiting for now. And then we shall be married very soon, and he wants to have a long honeymoon in Italy. And then we shall go and live at Stones."

"And Rina—if I feel I can't give my consent? If I feel it would be wrong—failing in my duty toward you?"

Their eyes met.

"I suppose it sounds silly and sentimental, but it would break my heart," said Rina. "I won't go against you. You saved me from having to marry Toni, and I know when you think it over that you won't take away this happiness from me."

"And if I asked you to wait a year? To make sure of your own heart? To give Markham time to break loose from this friendship?"

"I would try to do as you wish. But you'd never be so cruel! It would be worse for Markham than for me, for I should be content to wait. I think it

would kill him—it would put him to too great a test."

"You know I shall never get your grandfather to consent," said Helen.

"Must you tell him everything?"

"Why, of course I must tell him. You are very near to him, Rina, and he is your guardian as much as I am. Remember, you are his only son's only child."

"But you needn't say anything about Mr. Guise," said Rina almost pitifully.

"That is just what he ought to know. Catholic guardians have a very heavy responsibility."

To her astonishment Rina began quite weakly to cry.

"I know the danger—I'm prepared for it," she sobbed.

Helen looked at her wistfully.

"You can't realize it, nor what it may mean in the future. Later, when perhaps he will care a little less passionately, it may return with greater force. It's easy for him to promise now that he'll give up these friends of his. But perhaps it won't prove so easy when it comes to the point. Perhaps they will refuse to give him up, and then you will have to deal not only with Markham, but with a very unscrupulous man and woman, bent on destroying your happiness and his."

"I know I can keep him away from them," she said, with a sudden renewal of confidence.

In the end she won her point. Not very soon nor very easily, however, for many weeks passed before the old prince could be brought to give his consent; he was even more passionately opposed to the marriage than Helen was. He had formed other plans for his cherished granddaughter, and he could not

readily be brought to see that her whole happiness was at stake.

Innumerable letters passed between her two guardians and the Proctors, mother and son. From a worldly point of view, nothing could be more satisfactory than Mrs. Proctor's proposals. She had complete control of a large fortune, and, being wholly free from extravagant tastes—beyond her particular mania for traveling—she had never spent all her income. It had been allowed to accumulate, and she was a far richer woman than when she had first been left a widow. She was prepared to give up Stones to Markham, only retaining a tiny *pied-à-terre* for herself, and to settle upon him a very large sum if he made a marriage of which she approved. And Rina had been in a manner her own choice. Mrs. Proctor had herself planned her first visit to Stones, because she had come to the conclusion that she was the very woman to exercise a strong and wise influence over her son. She felt sure that Rina would succeed where she had failed.

But when this was admitted, all had been said that could possibly be said in favor of the marriage. Rina would be lost to her father's people. She would not only cease to be Florentine, but she would also cease to be Italian. She would disappear from their midst and live always in England. Even that might have been accepted by the old prince, though always with a sense of bitter disappointment. But the character of Markham was an obstacle which seemed for a long time in his eyes quite insuperable. It was not indeed one which shone under the severe scrutiny to which it was subjected. The old prince knew both Guise and his writings very well by repute. He had written a good deal about Italy, and "The Chessboard" had owed much of its setting

to that country. It had been translated and had been condemned as a very mischievous book. To allow Rina the remotest chance of meeting this man and his wife was unthinkable. Why had she not submitted to their wisdom and married Toni? He asked this question querulously a dozen times a day. If she had married Toni she would have run no risks beyond the common risks of all marriages, and she would have lived close to them all her life. They would have had her under their eye, and there would have been no danger for her nor anxiety for them. Why was the girl so obstinate—so self-willed? It was her English blood, the old prince told himself indignantly, though he was too courteous to make so disparaging a remark to Helen.

It was a time of endless discussion, of mutual interchange of letters, of frantic appeals from Markham, of quiet pressure from Mrs. Proctor, of fiery trial for Rina. She gave abundant evidence in those days of the inherent sweetness of her disposition. While she held firm, she was always loving and dutiful, perhaps more than ever before, from the knowledge that she was bound to grieve them. Even her grandfather was obliged to admit that Rina's behavior, under circumstances that were admittedly trying, was almost perfect. She was bright and equable and gentle; there was nothing of the martyr about her. She was as one upheld by a secret force, by the strength of secret hopes. She never allowed herself to look woebegone nor persecuted, as nine out of ten maidens would assuredly have done. She serenely and hopefully put her destiny in their hands, making it quite clear that she would abide by their decision. There was a simplicity about this which went a long way to complete the old man's final capitulation.

And, as is nearly always the case in such matters,

the defences gradually gave way. The principal parties remained firm, the opposing forces surrendered as before some mighty and primitive force. Toward the middle of July Markham was permitted to come to Florence for a fortnight's visit, to make the acquaintance of Rina's mother and grandfather. After that he was to return home while they went for their annual *villeggiatura* to the old villa in the Casentino. The wedding was provisionally fixed for the middle of September.

The little struggle had exhausted Rina. She was horrified on looking back to discover how near she had been to giving in. It was not that her love failed, for she had come to look upon that as a permanent thing that must color her life forever. But she was weary of the effort; she hesitated to combat the opposition of those so near and dear. She needed, too, the support of Markham's presence, the renewal of those words and vows of enduring love. That swift and brief love affair had become almost like a beautiful dream that could have no sequence in reality. It faded a little, lost something of its glory, its splendor.

Markham's letters did more than anything to keep her firm and unyielding in the face of that loving opposition. They were frequent, for he wrote every day, and he did contrive to imbue them with something of his own charm. He wrote easily and well, and the letters filled Rina's life; they brought her a daily, wonderful happiness. When at last she was allowed to write and tell him to come it seemed as if her cup of joy were filled to overflowing.

And his coming broke down the last fabric of Helen's opposition. His gaiety and charm brought new life into the old palace. Flushed with victory, Markham was a very agreeable person indeed. Even the old prince acknowledged that there was

ample reason for Rina's infatuation. He was more reconciled to the marriage than he had ever been before. And even to Rina's eyes it was touching to see Markham with the old man, courteous, deferential, attentive to his wants. His visit was a perfect success, and it came to an end all too quickly. Helen was perfectly satisfied when she saw Markham and Rina leaving the palace together daily to attend the early Mass in the Santissima Trinità. It was a return for him to the old devotional practices that in his father's lifetime he had never omitted. They learned, too, that since Rina's departure from England Markham had been living quietly at Stones with his mother, planning changes and alterations for the future.

Helen was able to reassure herself that they had taken every reasonable precaution; Markham had shown a firm purpose of amendment, and there was no reason why Rina should not marry him. She watched his going with regret, for she knew that the fortnight had been perhaps the happiest time of Rina's whole life.

CHAPTER XIX

MARKHAM and Rina were sitting on the terrace that overlooked the sea in the hotel garden at Sorrento. Although it was now October, the day was very warm, and the sky was as blue as in summer. It was very still, the sea was almost glassy in its calm, and the red and white sails of the fishing-boats were motionless and were clearly reflected in the water. Across the Bay they looked northward toward Naples, which from this point of view presented an agreeable confusion of cream-colored

buildings, straggling along the coast and climbing in serried ranks up the hill behind the city. Nearer, the mountains were painted in delicate tones of soft purple and green, broken here and there by a tiny village clinging pearl-like to the lower slopes. Little shining towns edged themselves between the mountains and the sea. Vesuvius was clearly outlined, and from its summit a trail of gray smoke, soft as a plume, rose almost perpendicularly into the clear blue of the sky. The chestnut woods that clothed the steep hills behind Sorrento were touched with their autumn fire, and the vineyards were empty except for a few trailing crimson leaves. In spite of the warmth of the sun there was a delicious, crisp, autumn quality in the air, invigorating as new wine.

Markham and Rina had been married nearly a month, and were already beginning to forget what life had been like before this momentous change which had come upon them. They were extremely happy; they were already getting used to each other's little ways, although in the twenties such idiosyncrasies are never very formidable nor very crystallized. They had received just enough opposition to make them value their present happiness the more. Markham had all along realized that "it was up to him to make good," as he expressed it; but the making good had so far presented but little difficulty. As far as he was concerned, during those first weeks of his honeymoon Adrian Guise might never have existed at all. He was beginning to feel that shrinking disgust with the Guises and their teachings and their views which people who have been suddenly wrested from a bad habit often feel toward the ancient temptation.

After their wedding, which had been very quietly celebrated in Florence, Markham and Rina went to

Perugia and Assisi. From thence they had traveled to Rome, had seen the *vendemmia* at Frascati, and then journeyed south to Naples and Sorrento. The south was as new to Rina as it was to her husband. In the whole of Italy perhaps few places are so arrestingly beautiful as Sorrento; its very name holds magic for the traveler, conjuring up visions of the splendor of its blue days, the wonder of its moonlit nights, the radiance of its white dawns, the scent of its orange-blossoms in spring, of roses in summer, of ripened grapes in autumn.

The garden formed a kind of natural terrace on the summit of the high, dark tufa cliff; a low railing ran along the edge, framing square blue patches of sea. Groves of ilex-trees came down almost to the edge of the narrow path. The roses were still in bloom; tall scarlet salvias lifted their flaming spires from a cluster of deep brown leaves; tufts of pink carnations lent color and fragrance. Markham and Rina were able to bathe every morning in that calm warm sea. They were like two children, perfectly happy and free from care. Markham was deeply in love with his young wife; it seemed to him that he loved her more every day. As a matter of fact, Rina was the less sentimental of the two, now that she could feel that he was hers forever. It was not that he was less wonderful, but that he was more her own.

This was holiday time. They were still idling in Italy. Their real life together would begin when they went to Stones, and Rina was looking forward perhaps more than Markham was to being settled in their own home. But she looked forward patiently and with a deep content, very happy in the present and with no misgivings for the future.

Markham knew how nearly he had lost her through his own fault, and the knowledge was an ex-

cellent discipline for him. It made him humble and careful in little things and gave to his character a certain force. When he thought of Stones it was with a deep resolve to make their life there as perfect as possible, to recover something of that atmosphere it had known in his father's time. Sometimes they would discuss the matter together, and make plans for the future.

This afternoon Markham was sitting at a small easel, making a water-color sketch of the Bay, a delicate, small piece of work that he was executing very deftly. Rina sat near him, working. Very often she stopped to look at Markham, to watch the sure touches, the strong, slight, long-fingered hands that were at once so powerful and so delicately trained. The artist in him appealed to her very strongly. She liked to see him at work.

"There! What do you think of that?"

Markham threw himself back in his chair and, holding out his left hand, clasped Rina's.

"I think it's perfectly lovely. Don't do much more to it, Markham, it's so perfect already."

"Flatterer!" he said, but she could see that he was pleased. Indeed her warm appreciation, so evident in her voice, delighted him. No one except Adrian Guise and his wife had ever given him any encouragement in his artistic career. Mrs. Proctor had always disliked it because it had taken him away from home; he had made it his excuse for that bachelor studio house in Chelsea of which she had so heartily disapproved. Indeed, it had been a cause of considerable dissension between him and his mother, and she had perhaps remained wilfully blind to the fact that he possessed a real gift, strong enough to compel him to work at his art. But Rina very wisely saw that work of some kind was a necessity for an idle, rich, unoccupied man. And she be-

lieved in Markham's talent. She encouraged him. Even on their honeymoon he had filled a whole book with sketches. She felt that they would be like a little history of those weeks they had spent together in some of the loveliest parts of Italy—something which they could look back upon with delight and which would supply ill-remembered details.

"Isn't it rather like a picture post-card?" said Markham, rising and looking down critically upon his work.

"Not in the least!" said Rina indignantly.

She rose, too, and looked down at the shore below. On the strip of sand some boys were playing. Others could be seen bathing, the little dark heads looking like floating black bubbles on the sea. Sometimes she caught the flash of a brown limb that gave the impression of a bronze statue suddenly come to life. Their shouts and cries were very audible in the summer silence.

"There's the steamer just coming in," said Rina presently.

Markham left his easel and came and stood by her side, slipping his arm round her. She was dressed in white to-day, and her tall, slight figure as she stood there, outlined against the blue, had a suggestion of power in it. Her height, her long neck, the way she held her head with its coronal of warm golden hair made her in his eyes a superb vision of youth and loveliness. He was intensely proud of her and almost jealously possessive. He turned to look at her, and drew her a little nearer to him.

"I do hope it won't bring any British bores to-day," he said, "those two old maids who came yesterday were about the limit. One can get away from the bores of other nations, but one's own——"

"I can't see very well yet," said Rina. The slop-

ing sun was in her eyes and she put her hands to shade them. "Yes, now I can see. There are three people getting into the boat—two women and a man. They don't look particularly English," she added hopefully.

Markham left her for a moment and took up some field-glasses that were lying near his easel.

Then he returned and gazed at the approaching boat as it was rowed swiftly toward the little landing-stage. One of the women was sitting with her back to them, but he could see almost plainly the man and woman who were sitting side by side in the stern. They seemed strangely familiar to him. He put down the glasses with an abrupt startled gesture. Of course it could not be; his nerves were playing tricks again.

"Why, what's the matter, Markham?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing," said Markham, with a studied carelessness. "I'm afraid though that they do look like bores, and as for their being English, I'm pretty certain of it."

"Don't let it disturb you—we need never speak to them. We are always out here by ourselves. But you mustn't be quite so rude to them as you were to that English parson and his wife we met at Assisi."

As she spoke she slipped her hand into his. She was still watching intently the little boat with its occupants. She did not look at Markham; had she done so she must have seen that his face had grown very pale.

It was nonsense, of course, he reflected; it would be a perfectly impossible coincidence, almost melodramatic in its absurdity, but the man and the woman sitting in the stern of the hotel boat did bear an extraordinary resemblance to Adrian Guise and his wife.

What were they doing in Italy—these people who

professed themselves as never happy unless they were "in the thick of things in London"? What were they doing here? In vain he asked himself these questions, always returning to the same consoling belief that he had made a mistake, had been deceived by a chance resemblance.

And even if it should prove indeed to be the Guises it was ridiculous to imagine for a moment that their coming to Sorrento could have any reference to himself. He had kept his promise so rigidly that except for a brief note announcing his engagement he had not communicated with them at all. Such a communication had met with Helen's approval as the simplest mode of telling them of the change that was bound to ensue. They were not stupid. Indeed, they were both alarmingly intelligent, and he knew from the reply he had received as well as from the coldness of their congratulations that they understood the situation perfectly and were prepared to resign themselves to the changed conditions. His fiancée's name, Donna Rina Ubinaldi, a niece of Lady Ellington's, was in itself sufficient to inform them that Markham was making a marriage after his mother's own heart, that his wife would be a good and pious Catholic, and that he was forever lost as a disciple of intellectual apostasy.

And if they were really to appear suddenly in Sorrento, staying at precisely the same hotel as themselves?

The bare thought of such a meeting affected Markham profoundly. To meet people with whom one has once been on terms of close and friendliest intimacy, when mutual friendship is no longer a possible nor a desirable thing, must always be acutely painful to a sensitive person. Markham shrank from the thought of such an encounter as he would have shrunk from the deliberate infliction of phy-

sical pain. How would it be possible for him to avoid them altogether? Yet it was his manifest duty to Rina to avoid them, for her sake as well as for his own. Markham had not made that promise to Rina, repeating it afterward to Helen and the old prince, without a very solemn intention of keeping it to the very letter. He no longer felt any temptation to seek out these people, with whom he had been once on such close terms of friendship. He was no longer in touch with them; he had ceased to have any sympathy with their aims and ideals. But in the beginning the rupture had cost him something that closely resembled pain. He disliked the sense of dishonoring an old friendship. It always seemed as if blame must be attached to the one who broke off a friendship, who ceased to communicate. He had not liked this laying of himself open to the charge of being capricious and fickle. But he had gained his heart's desire, and he was in the mood when a man will pour, more or less willingly, libations to the new gods.

Viewed at this distance the sacrifice seemed to him infinitesimal; he wondered that he should have given it any further consideration. All pain had gone from it and sometimes he had been able to feel a sensation of relief that it had been accomplished so swiftly, without struggle, without recriminations.

But he did not want to see them again—ever. What would Rina think if they suddenly appeared at Sorrento? She might well imagine that such a meeting was a premeditated, prearranged thing, deliberately planned. He looked at Rina. Her eyes were still fixed upon the boat; she always showed an extraordinary interest in its daily arrival from Naples. On several afternoons she had even insisted upon going down to the terrace on purpose to watch for it. Sometimes she made up little absurd

stories about the people who arrived in it and came up into the garden through the dark steps inside the cliff. To-day she was just as happy and amused as usual, but he made no response and yet she did not notice his silence. He looked at Rina, and for the first time since their marriage he felt that a shadow had arisen between them—the first shadow on the white bliss of their happiness. And she was still quite unconscious of it. To him it was almost terrible that Rina should have no premonition of what might be aproaching. He, nervous and apprehensive, felt its approach as something cold and sinister. . . . He longed to take Rina in his arms and tell her of his fears. It was only fair that she should know —that she should share them. But his courage failed him. He could only remember how near Adrian Guise had been to parting them forever. It was this fact that made him hate and detest the very remembrance of that old friendship. Often since his marriage he had had the thought that he should dislike Rina even to meet Adelaide.

Rapidly his mind glanced over the history of the last few months. He had been to confession before his marriage, his Church imposed that obligation upon him; he must be in a state of grace to receive that sacrament. On the morning of his marriage he had knelt side by side with Rina in the little chapel at the old palace, and had received Holy Communion. Helen was there and the old prince; it had been for them all a very solemn moment. To Markham it had brought back many memories of his first communion made in the chapel at Stones, with his father and mother kneeling there in one of the proudest moments Catholic parenthood can ever know. Markham had been a very devout boy, and since his marriage he had recaptured something of his old fervor. Every day he and Rina rose early and went

to Mass together. Each day had seemed consecrated to God by the spending of that early hour in witnessing the Holy Sacrifice. Rina had never relinquished the habit, and it seemed only natural that Markham should accompany her. Still, it gave her a very keen joy that he insisted upon doing this, that he came so eagerly. It seemed to set a very special seal upon their marriage. She could feel that, as far as a human being can ever do so, she had helped to win back this soul that had been so very near to going astray in the wilderness, following those paths that lead to outer darkness. It had made Markham very dear to her, and dear in an intimately possessive way, just as if she had helped to save him from a great physical peril. The very act of rescue had given her special rights. . .Markham realized all this very clearly. If he sometimes underestimated the danger now that it was past, he did not minimize it to her.

"They are coming up the steps now—we shall see them in a minute," said Rina, turning her face toward the opening in the cliff from which the steps to the shore descended steeply through a deep hollow.

Markham felt a little impatient. She was so unconscious of approaching evil—and she ought not to be so unconscious! He said rather irritably:

"My dear Rina, I should have thought the steamer and its occupants would have begun to pall upon you by this time!"

It was the worst thing he could have done, from his own point of view, to call her attention thus to his nervous ill-humor. She was so surprised that she turned and glanced at him quite sharply, and she was astonished to find how pale and suddenly ill he looked.

"Oh, Markham—I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to

bore you," she said, full of apology and contrition.

"Oh, you don't bore me," said Markham, a little ashamed. "But I am not feeling particularly brilliant. Sitting out in this hot sun with the glare in my eyes has given me a headache."

As he spoke two heads became visible, obscurely delineated against the dark background of the doorway. They were followed by the two figures that belonged to them, and faces and figures emerged precise and clear and stood for a moment upon the terraced pathway overlooking the sea, as if pausing to take breath after their steep climb.

Markham and his wife were standing some little distance away, nearer to the other end of the terrace, but they were quite near enough to see the two travelers with sufficient distinctness. The man was so big and tall that he stood out quite conspicuously. He had taken off his hat and displayed a thick mass of graying hair. He wore a fair beard that was untouched by gray at all. His age might have been between forty-five and fifty. His strong, broad-shouldered, loose-limbed figure, together with his immense height, suggested power. By his side stood a small woman, thin, dark, with a brown skin. She was carelessly even shabbily dressed. To Rina they were unmistakably British, but to Markham they were as unmistakably—as he now perceived to his dismay—the figures of Adrian Guise and his wife, Adelaide.

"What a perfectly exquisite garden," said Adelaide, in her drawling musical tones, which some one had once called golden. It was the voice of the born speaker, who can arrest and hold and sway her audience. Markham could remember the time when he had listened to it from the sheer pleasure of hearing her speak. He had overlooked the matter—which had rather shocked him—in con-

sideration of the manner in which it was delivered.

All her charm was in her voice; when she spoke one could forget that she was no longer young, and that her appearance was dowdy and insignificant.

"Well, we must go on to the hotel," said Adrian's big booming voice with its hearty bass notes, "I suppose we must see about rooms. It's not likely to be crowded so late in the season."

"Mind you ask for rooms looking on to the sea. I shall want to hang my head out of the window all day."

They moved up the broad paved path between the rose-bushes and the deep orange-groves that spread away on either hand decorated with their shining golden globes.

"They are certainly British, but I don't think they look like bores," said Rina, slipping her arm in Markham's the moment she found herself quite alone with him. "In fact I rather liked her voice. They are very badly matched in height, aren't they?" She watched critically their two retreating figures. "Markham, do you wish I'd been small? Just not quite up to your elbow? You could have looked down on me then."

She smiled up into his face, and then she saw that something was really amiss, something that couldn't be forgotten even if one talked nonsense in the hope that it would go away.

"Markham, dear; what *is* the matter?" There was real alarm in her tone. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

Markham looked at her, pallid, distraught.

"I'm not sure that I haven't," he said.

A little fear, still formless and undefined, seized her. What did he mean? She began for the first time to associate those two arrivals with his sudden inexplicable change of mood. And then, for the

first time since their marriage, she too became conscious of a dark and cold shadow that seemed to fall upon them, staining the perfect radiance of their happiness. The days had been so tranquil, so beautiful; their loving absorption in each other had become each day a more wonderful and a more tender thing. Their perfect sympathy upon all questions that really mattered had deepened day by day. They had never wearied for a moment of each other's society; their friendship as well as their love had increased.

"Who are those people, Markham? Do you know them?"

She looked at him with troubled eyes. His hand clutched hers almost savagely; the grasp hurt her.

"Markham—don't. You are hurting my hand. Please tell me why you are so strange."

There was a sharp little note of anxiety in her voice.

He released her.

"Darling, I'm so sorry," he said, tenderly. "I was thinking of something else." He lifted the reddened hand to his lips and kissed it almost fiercely.

"What is the matter? Do please tell me."

Rina spoke with a note of irritation in her voice. She was so frightened that it made her almost angry.

"That man is Adrian Guise. The woman is his wife. Now are you satisfied?"

Rina did not speak; she felt as if the words had stunned her so that she was hardly capable of realizing their meaning. She turned away from her husband and looked at the fairy scene in front of her, painted, now that the hour of sunset was rapidly approaching, in tones of delicate silver and rose and gold. Far below she could hear the soft, whispering lisp of the sea as the waves touched the sands.

Naples was a magic city, flushed and golden, hanging above the silver-pale waters of the Bay. It was very beautiful, but now it seemed to her that it held a menace. The fear that had completely vanished from her life had returned. The conflict that she had believed forever terminated was to be resumed. But the fear had come back changed and immeasurably deepened. She saw it as something fierce and terrible and sinister. The enemy, until now obscure and hidden, had suddenly assumed definite shape; his shadow was upon her path. Adelaide's low, subtly attractive voice filled all the evening air. And Adrian's huge figure etched against the blue seemed to her strong and powerful and unconquerable as doom itself. She felt her own helplessness; she felt in every fiber of her being the weakness of Markham.

"Did they know we were here?" she said at last. "Did you tell them, Markham?"

Their intimacy was so complete that she was too simple to hide this suspicion from him. It evoked a little movement of petulant anger.

"No, I did not tell them. You know I have never written. If they knew we were here they must have learned it from another source!"

Rina felt intensely relieved.

"We needn't take any notice of them and we can go away to-morrow. You know we always meant to go on to Amalfi."

"How can I possibly avoid speaking to them?" demanded Markham. "I really don't see how I'm to cut them altogether. And if I did it might amount to a confession of weakness—it would look as if I were afraid."

"It would be safer not to speak," said Rina quietly. Her eyes met his unflinchingly. "It would

be a more perfect way of keeping your promise," she added, wondering a little at her own courage.

Markham's outburst of anger had not quite died away, and her words renewed it. He felt intensely irritable at the false position in which he had suddenly found himself, and he was really perplexed as to the course he ought to adopt. He did not want to pass by these old friends of his without a single word. He was under countless obligations to them —obligations of which Rina knew nothing. There was the time when they had found him lying ill and neglected and suffering from pleurisy, and had taken him forthwith to their own house to nurse him. He had often and often borrowed money from Adrian when he had come to the end of his allowance and his mother had refused to give him any more. The money had all been repaid long ago, but the memory of those and countless other obligations and little kindnesses seemed to stand in the way of his taking so drastic a step as his wife proposed.

He disliked being reminded of his promise. He had kept it; he had utterly renounced that old friendship; he had cut himself free with one fierce stroke, almost he felt as if he had used a knife. And in the worst days of suspense and anxiety, when his fate had hung in the balance and he did not know whether he should ever be permitted to see Rina again, he had never gone near them; he had eaten his heart out—as the saying goes—at Stones. He had resolved that if the day ever dawned when he might go to Rina as her future husband he would be able to say: "I have never seen the Guises since the day you promised to marry me." It had hurt him when she turned so sharply to him just now and asked: "Did you tell them, Markham?" She had no right to ask such a question, suggesting bad faith on his part. He was full of angry resentment, like a child

who has been falsely accused and protests against a threatened punishment.

Rina's words had struck him like a whip . . . Hadn't she learned yet that she could trust him? Why should she suspect him of corresponding with Adrian Guise?

"Of course it is very awkward," he admitted at last, "but if we go away to-morrow, which I think is a sound scheme, that'll limit the awkwardness to one evening. If they take any notice of me I'll be civil and no more. But of course I won't introduce them to you."

"No, please not," said Rina coldly.

It was absurd, he told himself, that she should take this attitude as if there were still any danger for him in these old friends. Such danger was a thing of the past. She ought to have seen that for herself. He assured himself that he had always been reluctant to listen to Adrian when he spoke against the Catholic Church; his faith had never really been imperiled by the teachings of the older man. He had been thankful that with his marriage he had been given the opportunity to return to a more devout practice of his religion, and he had been glad and not sorry that Rina was so devout. It gave her for him an added beauty and charm. But she ought to feel more sure of him now; she ought to be satisfied that all danger for him was at an end. He hated that she should believe him to be so deplorably weak as her words had suggested—so weak that he was not even to be trusted to speak to Adrian and his wife. She ought to know by this time that his love for her was too great to permit of any other influence in his life. She must not demand impossibilities of him, and call them perfections. And he could not allow Adrian to believe he was so completely under his wife's thumb that he did not even

dare speak to his old friends when—as would be unfortunately manifest—she disapproved of them.

Adrian would not need to be told on what grounds she disapproved. He had had too much cold-shouldering from Catholics in London and elsewhere. And perhaps he would ascribe something of Rina's attitude to feminine jealousy—the young wife's dislike of her husband's old friends. Markham shrank from the hours that lay immediately before him. Whatever they held for him they were certain to be miserable hours of discomfiture and perhaps shame. He would have to bear all the brunt of it—would have to lay himself open to base charges of ingratitude, forgetfulness of benefits, and caprice. . . .

At the back of all his arguments there lurked the man's intense dislike to submission to a woman's suggestion. Rina must learn that he was master at least of his own conduct. He would gladly extend the same perfect liberty to her, but she must clearly understand that he could not be coerced. He would keep his promise faithfully in the spirit; all intimate friendship with the Guises was at an end, but to-night if they chanced to meet face to face he must greet them with the civility demanded of an old acquaintance. . . .

CHAPTER XX

THEY were a little late in going down to dinner that night. The big dining-room, which had been cleverly constructed from the *cortile* of the ancient monastery that had stood on the site of the hotel, was almost full. The ancient massive pillars now supported the arched roof, and the single im-

mense window at the western end framed a delicious prospect of sea and sky with a foreground of verdure in which a solitary cypress stood up like a spire of black smoke. The Proctors had a little table near this window and Rina always sat facing it. To-night she could see the dark outline of the cypress emphasizing the pallor of the moon-washed sky which was faintly dusted with stars.

Markham followed his wife into the room, looking straight ahead of him as if he were determined not to recognize any of the assembled company; there was a touch of self-conscious arrogance in his mien. Rina was looking superb and he found himself enjoying the knowledge; she had so much grace and distinction apart from the beauty of her face. A vague hope filled his heart that the Guises, who were surely unaware of his presence in the hotel, would dine in their own room. They were not sociable when traveling, as it generally meant a time of repose and recuperation for them both, and he knew that they disliked making hotel acquaintances. They traveled to get away from people and to refresh their minds with new scenes. But this hope of his was of the flattering kind and soon gave place to an ugly little fear that the Guises had come to Italy for a definite reason connected with himself, and that they were certainly present somewhere in the long dining-room.

He sat by Rina's side, not opposite to her as he did not want to obstruct her view of the night sky. But to-night he turned a little sideways, leaning his elbow on the table so that his back was slightly turned to the assembled company.

"Are they here? Did you see them as we came in?" he asked in a nervous tone.

"No, I didn't look," Rina answered.

Markham disliked the sense of constraint that had

arisen between himself and his wife since the little scene in the garden. He fancied there was a touch of coldness in her manner toward him. He resented her attitude, which seemed to put him in the wrong.

She said hastily:

"It really can't matter to either of us if they are here or not."

"Oh, you are absurd," said Markham quickly.

He felt that Rina was quite unreasonable; she was making a mountain out of a molehill; she did not in the least realize how completely he had freed himself. More to annoy her than for any other reason, for her remark had made him irritable, he turned round and gave a deliberate glance that searched the whole room.

He saw the Guises sitting opposite to each other at a small table to the right of the door, in the far corner of the room. It was always impossible for late arrivals to secure a table near the window, especially when the hotel was at all full.

Adrian Guise happened to be looking in Markham's direction; their eyes met. He nodded and smiled and called his wife's attention to Markham; bows were exchanged. Markham's face was perfectly grave and composed as he greeted them in this distant fashion, he did not smile. Then he turned away and began to talk to Rina. He felt slightly ashamed at this almost childish manifestation of independence, and there was a veiled scorn in her eyes that stung him.

They discussed the food, Rina responding indifferently; she was eating very little. Presently Markham said:

"Do you really want to go away to-morrow?"

"There's nothing else to do," she answered, looking at him with a kind of curiosity.

"Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere you like. It's impossible to stay here."

"Why impossible?" he asked.

Rina looked at him quite gravely and did not answer. She was aware of his unreasonable and resentful mood. He reminded her to-night of the misunderstood, rather sullen Markham who had sometimes been visible at Stones.

"Why is it impossible?" he repeated.

"Oh, Markham dear, you know that as well as I do."

"If I consulted myself—my own feelings—my own wishes, I should remain here," he said.

There was a pause. Rina's heart beat a little more quickly.

"Do you intend always to arrange everything—to rule our lives—to tell me what I am to do in this dictatorial, authoritative way? Do you expect me always to obey you?" he demanded.

His eyes flashed; his face was white with passion. Rina had never seen him really angry before, and there was something in his voice that made her afraid of him, with a shrinking, physical fear she had never experienced since she was a child and had been confronted by the tempestuous anger of her grandfather for some trivial offense.

She had always run then if possible to her mother for protection, and she had the same half-formed wish for Helen's presence now.

She answered in a cold voice that betrayed no terror:

"That is an exaggeration. I am only asking you to keep your promise to me. I am trying to make it easier for you—not more difficult. Do not let us discuss it, Markham, this isn't the time nor the place. Afterward." She looked at him entreatingly.

Markham relapsed into a sulky silence. That promise, which had been comparatively easy to make, had suddenly become a thorny thing of contention. He intended to keep the spirit of it, but Rina was trying to bind him to the letter. She was going the right way to work, he told himself, if she intended to force him to seek refuge this evening in Adrian's society.

"I have finished. Shall we go?" said Rina, rising. The fruit lay untouched on her plate. Markham's harsh words had made her feel suddenly lonely; she had a strange wish to cry.

They both rose and left the room. Markham nodded again to Adrian as he passed, and there was an added geniality in his manner as he greeted him the second time, but he did not stop to speak to them as Rina feared that he might. They did not linger downstairs in the lounge that evening, but they went straight up to their rooms and strolled out on to the private terrace that belonged to their suite.

It was warm and still. There was a faint odor of damp earth, mingling with the scent of those late autumn roses and a touch of brackishness from the sea. An immense umbrella pine stood up darkly in the foreground like a gigantic mop. They could see the light of a felucca moving starlike across the gray shadow of the sea that was pale with moonlight. Down by the shore they could hear a voice singing a monotonous melancholy refrain that had something oriental in its lilt.

Coffee was brought up to them and Rina poured it out while Markham lit his cigarette in silence.

Suddenly Rina stretched her hand across the little iron table that stood between them.

"Markham, dear, we mustn't quarrel. That would be too dreadful;" she said, touching his hand with a gesture of entreaty. "We have been so happy up till now, haven't we?"

He was instantly mollified, flung away his cigarette, and coming over to her side he took her in his arms and crushed her almost violently to his heart, covering her face with kisses.

"Oh, Rina darling, I'm a brute," he said. "Of course I'll do whatever you wish. I'll go wherever you like. Back to Naples—Rome—Florence—anywhere, so that we can be alone together, just you and I."

"Let us go to Naples, then, and make plans. It's on our way home and we didn't see it properly." Home to Rina was still the old Ubinaldi palace.

"Shall we leave by the early train? Will it be too early for you, darling? It means leaving here for Castellamare soon after six, you know."

"Oh, no," said Rina eagerly, "it's not at all too early. I'll tell Giovanna to pack at once."

"And I'll go down and say we shan't want our rooms after to-morrow. I must tell them to call us in good time."

"Don't be long, Markham."

He was still holding her as if he never intended to let her go again. The hard clasp of his arms comforted her, and gave her a sense of safety and security. She put up her face to be kissed; she wanted to be reassured that he did still love her, that he was not angry with her any more. Markham kissed her in a long, tender fashion on lips and forehead and hair. Their reconciliation was so beautiful that she felt as if it more than compensated for the few sharp and angry words and the sense of fear they had evoked. When at last Markham left her to go downstairs and give the orders for their departure, she cried a little from sheer relief. They were happy, delicious tears. Rina could never remember crying in just that way before.

She left the terrace reluctantly and went into her room to ring for the maid. She took off her dress, and put on a loose white wrapper very daintily made with lace and pale blue ribbons. Markham would certainly return in a few minutes; he had not seemed to wish to leave her even for that short space of time.

He seemed dearer than ever to her to-night. She felt as if she had never quite realized how precious he was. The scene on the terrace, highly emotional as it had been, had taught her that he was still passionately devoted to her. At first she had feared she had been wanting in tact, now she saw that she had done well to be perfectly firm on the subject of his promise.

She felt a little exhausted with all the complicated emotions of the evening, and when Giovanna had come and was busy with the packing she threw a long dark cloak over her shoulders and went out again on to the terrace to wait there for Markham.

Half an hour passed and then Giovanna came out to tell her that she had packed everything as far as she could; the remainder of the things must be put into the trunks in the morning. She would go now into the Signore's room to pack his things, and then she would go to bed. She wished Rina *"Buona notte, buon riposo"*, as is the invariable custom in Italy, and then she left her alone.

It was very still, but certain sounds became audible across the stillness, the crisp wash of the waves against the cliffs, the throbbing of a distant mandolin. Rina sat rather huddled in the far corner of the terrace on a low basket chair. She leaned her arms on the deep stone ledge and gazed seaward, while a feeling of very great anxiety took possession of her heart. Still Markham did not come. It was his usual habit to go up to bed much later

than she did; he was fond of going for a stroll the last thing, but to-night he had not mentioned such an intention and she could not account for his delay in joining her. She would have liked to sit with him for a little out here on the terrace, under the stars.

Suddenly she heard footsteps on the gravel path of the garden below. She bent her head over the wide ledge and looked down. Two figures passed her, going down the broad pale path to the sea. She could see the red, glowing light of a cigar. One was an immense man, tall, powerful; his huge form looked almost gigantic in the wan moonlight. By his side a younger, slighter man moved with more rapid footsteps. The light from the lower rooms of the hotel illuminated them obscurely. Then she heard a low, trailing voice say:

"Good night, Mark. Don't keep Adrian out too long. He isn't really a bit fit, and I'm afraid of the night air for him."

Then she heard Markham's gay laugh.

"All right, Adelaide. I'll see he goes in in good time. Good night."

"Mark" . . . "Adelaide." There was something terrible to Rina in this careless interchange of Christian names, and in this familiar use of the shortened "Mark", which she had never heard her husband called before, even by his mother, she realized for the first time how close had been the intimate friendship of these three people, one of whom was her husband. Mark. . . . She shivered a little, this shortening of his name seemed to hold a sinister significance. She herself had never called him Mark. The fact was sharply brought home to her that before she had ever known him they had been the principal people in his life. They had seen him perhaps nearly every day, had had that everyday knowledge of all the little passing things of his life;

they had known his goings out and comings in, the trivial business of each day, its works and disappointments and pleasant successes, the little hopes and fears, forming a chain almost as indestructible in the closeness of its intimacy as that which knits families together. These little happenings of Markham's life were hers now, they formed one with her own. But she saw that he must have made a far greater sacrifice in renouncing these friends of his than she had ever imagined. Just now she could put aside all its unpleasant significance and look at it from the purely human side. It was a friendship which had given a great deal to Markham. He had taken perhaps more than he had given, with that graceful carelessness of his. But he had undoubtedly valued it, and to give it up must have entailed suffering and sacrifice. . . .

These people, morever, had stood for something else, something more, in his life, still setting aside all that was disagreeable and dangerous. They were both very clever and intelligent; they had made their mark in the world, he as a writer, she as a speaker, and their house in London was a little center where brilliant men and women gathered. From this *milieu* Rina was aware that she had abruptly wrenched Markham. It was the price she had made him pay for her love, for his marriage with her. She had felt that she had rendered him a service, but it was the hard service of the surgeon who amputates a limb that is a danger to life itself. Necessary, perhaps, but always there is something a little cruel in the remedy . . . He had never spoken of the pain to her. But surely it must have given him moments of sharp pain. And in the sundering of all friendships, as of all loves, there must always be an element of disloyalty, shame, ingratitude. Markham must have tasted that bitterness

when he had thrown over these friends for a perfectly legitimate reason because she had insisted upon it. That was the hard human side which she had never before allowed herself to envisage. She had even felt a little sense of pride and triumph in taking him away from them when his mother with all her efforts had failed in the task. But to be able to look at the case from these novel points of view and sympathize in a sense with this fresh aspect of it, made Rina fear that she must be losing something of that crystal-clear vision of her girlhood, something too of that delicate scrupulousness of conscience which had often been rather a torment to her in the old days. She began to ask herself if she had been quite wise, quite tactful, to put Markham to so severe a test. It is true that her guardians had insisted upon that promise quite as much as she had, and had made it an irreducible condition of their engagement and subsequent marriage.

And then, as if to support their view, and her own as until now she had always believed it, there came back to her mind some of those unforgotten sentences from the startling pages of "The Chessboard." She remembered the poison of them that had produced in her almost a physical sense of nausea. She recalled her fierce anger that such a book should be permitted at Stones. And afterward Markham had told her it had been written by a man who had once been a Catholic. He had made money and fame by the book. And now out there in the pallid moonlit garden Markham was talking to this very man. They would have a great deal to say to each other; they had not met since last May. Five months . . . And in the interval Markham and she had been married. They had certainly been the most important months of her life; they had decided in a very final way her future

destiny. She had been almost too happy even to glance at the past which had once threatened to separate herself and Markham. Although they had not been married many weeks she was conscious that her marriage had brought to her a serenity and peace which her girlhood had never known. And now she felt that she had never really loved Markham until to-night, when her whole heart was crying out to him to return to her—to leave this man who was the declared enemy of the Faith they both so ardently cherished—to respect the promise he had made and by which alone he had been permitted to win her for his wife.

At last she grew cold and cramped from sitting there so long. There was no sound of footsteps on the path, no echo of approaching voices. Rina forced back the desolate tears that were threatening, and rose from her seat. She gave one look at the garden that was now wrapped in heavy shadow, then she went back into her room. The trunks gaped half-filled on the floor, reminding her that she would have to be up early and that if she did not go to bed soon she would get no sleep that night. The hotel was hushed in silence; most people must have gone to bed. In one of these rooms perhaps Mrs. Guise was sleeping soundly, glad to think that Markham had not quite deserted them, satisfied at the accomplishment of what had perhaps been a deliberate intrigue. What did they think of her, these people? Perhaps just the usual banal opinion—that she was a jealous young wife who resented her husband's forming any friendships apart from her.

Perhaps indeed they would despise Markham—and tell him so—for his easy submission to his wife's will. That would inflame anew the anger he had betrayed that night at dinner when he had asked her if she intended always to arrange everything—ex-

pecting him to obey . . . Then had come the reconciliation, the vehement kisses, the passionate, almost uncontrolled contrition of Markham. He loved her, and so far there had been no diminution in the ardor and devotion of his love. But would he always love her in this way? Would there not come a day when perhaps he would discover that she could not satisfy all his intellectual needs, that she was not a brilliant, cultivated woman like Adelaide Guise?

For the first time a very real fear for the future invaded Rina's heart. She saw the possibility of her becoming less to Markham, the danger of their marriage proving a failure—tragic contingencies of which the last few smiling radiant weeks had given no least hint.

She did not go to bed but sat there shivering in an armchair. It was after midnight when she heard footsteps in the passage, and Markham opened the door of his own room, very softly as if he were afraid of disturbing her. She went to the door that connected the two rooms and opened it.

"Markham," she said, and her voice trembled a little. Her shivering increased from nervousness and she felt that he must notice she was shaking.

"My dearest Rina, why aren't you in bed? You ought to have been there hours ago! You'll never be fit for an early start."

His voice rang out authoritatively but there was a touch of contempt and annoyance in his tone that made her wince.

"Do go to bed at once," he said sharply. "It's ever so late."

"Why—why are you so late, Markham? You've been gone hours."

She wished she could have steadied her voice but it was impossible.

Markham looked at her with bright, scornful eyes.

"There is nothing at all to be tragic about. I've only been talking to Adrian in the garden."

Rina stood there watching him. She felt as if she were in a dream; it seemed so impossible that Markham should be really saying just those words to her.

He came up to her and laid his hand not unkindly on her shoulder.

"So you see I have been a naughty disobedient boy," he said in a careless, defiant way. "Naturally we had a thousand things to talk about, and it's done me good, and blown some of the cobwebs away. He is such a clever, amusing fellow. You mustn't scold me to-night, Rina. And don't please look so tragic and depressing." He took her face in his hands and kissed her in a careless, good-humored way which she felt too weak and wretched to resist. "Good night—go along to bed."

He spoke to her as if she were a little child.

"Good night," said Rina in a dazed way. She still could not believe that the scene was real. If she had been able to believe it she thought it would certainly have broken her heart. She turned away and went back to her own room, shutting the door. She was crying, and she did not want Markham to hear the sound of her unrestrained sobbing.

Did Adrian Guise mean to take his revenge and punish her through Markham? In her forlorn and utter misery she felt that this might indeed be the case . . .

CHAPTER XXI

It was very dark when they set forth upon their drive to Castellamare on the following morning about half-past six. It was fine and very still; there was scarcely any wind, but the movement of the car

traveling rapidly made the air stir against their faces. Markham and Rina sat in the tonneau of the car, which was an open one; the maid Giovanna sat by the chauffeur in front. The remainder of the motor was piled up with luggage, trunks and bags and suit-cases.

The cool air revived Rina. She had spent a most miserable night, sleepless, feverish. She was exhausted and her eyes hurt her. Markham sat by her side hardly saying a word. They had not spoken to each other beyond what was absolutely necessary since the scene in his room last night.

To tell the truth, Markham was feeling somewhat ashamed of himself, but he felt that it would be fatal to acquaint Rina with the fact. She had obtained her own way in this matter of their sudden departure from Sorrento, and she ought to feel satisfied with this barren little victory.

Presently the first gleam of dawn showed white and brilliant over the eastern hills, faintly illuminating their summits. The mountains emerged from that cold sea of light. Soon all the coast was defined with the precision of a silhouette, and Vesuvius appeared, wonderfully beautiful, gray as a cloud, with a soft plume of smoke ascending from its summit and melting into the upper air. Now as the sun touched it the plume was faintly gilded and shone like golden incense floating up to heaven. The sky changed from white to green and little rosy clouds wandered lazily across its surface or hung in flower-like clusters above the sea. The sea was like a lake, still and clear and colorless as glass with a flat, unbroken surface. The idle red and white sails of the feluccas were mirrored in it . . .

"Adrian means to stay for another month at least," said Markham lighting a cigarette and look-

ing straight in front of him. "I envy him. He talks of wintering at Capri."

Evidently his thoughts were full of his friend. Then as Rina did not reply he added:

"He says Capri will be full of people this winter, and there's a decent English colony—artists and writers and people with ideas."

Yes—he was thinking of the world he had left, and perhaps asking himself if it had been worth while to make such heavy, such unusual, sacrifices as had been imposed upon him.

To-day the rift between herself and Markham seemed to Rina immeasurably wide. It is true that she had won her point and they had left Sorrento and the Guises behind them, but at what cost had she achieved this victory? He was coming with her reluctantly, resentfully, perhaps regretting that he could not form part of that happy English gathering at Capri. He was bent, too, on showing her that he had come away unwillingly. This thought cut her to the heart; she felt weak and dispirited, ready to cry. Would it be long before he forgave her for what she had done? At present reconciliation seemed out of the question; she did not even desire it. It would seem like a patched-up peace. They were strangers this morning. And yesterday, not twenty-four hours ago, their happiness had been perfect and complete. There had been no cloud in the sky to presage that coming storm.

"And then for the spring they've been lent a villa at Fiesole."

At Fiesole? . . . But it was unlikely that she and Markham would be in Florence themselves next spring. By that time they would surely have settled down to their new life at Stones; they would have taken possession of the old gray house on the Cotswold Hills. Mrs. Proctor was only awaiting their

return from their honeymoon to evacuate it; after their arrival she intended to leave for Italy and settle somewhere in an apartment, only returning to England for a few weeks in the summer.

"They are going to remain abroad some time, then?" she asked in a colorless voice.

"Yes, they've let their house in town. Adrian hasn't been well and he wants a rest, he's so bothered with people in London. The doctor said he'd better winter in a warmer climate. Adelaide always likes what he likes—she's very unselfish."

Rina felt the reproach in his voice. It was his way of informing her that she preferred her own will to his.

"Adrian isn't a fool. He knew quite well our coming off like this was a put-up job, and of course he guesses the reason!"

Rina's face was flushed.

"They know, in fact, my dear Rina, that you've got me well in hand. I'm a weak idiot, and I can tell you I was ashamed to look Adrian and Adelaide in the face last night!"

"Oh, Markham," said Rina entreatingly.

"Yes, you needn't look so glum about it. You've got your own way—witness this delicious early morning drive. But you might look a little more pleased with your success!"

Rina did not speak; she felt that in his present bitter mood it would be more prudent to keep silence. Soon he would come to his senses and be sorry. But just now he seemed to be bent on hurting her.

They had reached the top of the hill, following the winding white road that ascended through groves of orange and olive and spreading empty vineyards. Deep ravines, thickly wooded with chestnut-trees, aflame in their autumn bravery of bright gold, sloped sheer down to the sea. Some-

times they passed through the streets of a little town, perched almost on the edge of the cliff and looking from its eyrie across the lovely expanse of the Bay. Now they could see the chain of towns that stretched along the coast from Castellamare to Naples. Naples was emerging from the morning mist, and the city was half in shadow and half touched with a liquid golden radiance that flooded the pale houses. Then the car dipped down the hill and soon they were speeding along the flat and dusty road that led to Castellamare. They met with little traffic on the way; once they passed a tram, and sometimes they had to stop while a youthful person of pronounced Neapolitan type essayed to get his recalcitrant mules sufficiently to one side of the narrow road to permit them to pass.

By the time they had descended from the car at Castellamare and made their way into the already crowded little station Rina felt that she had passed through one of the most actively miserable hours of her life. Had she really offended Markham past forgiveness? Once he had assured her that he only needed her—that he would give up everything and every one in the world to gain her love. And already it was not sufficient for him, already he was beginning to discover perhaps that he had paid too high a price.

She wondered what explanations had passed between him and Adrian last night. How much had he told him of the pressure that had been brought to bear upon him? But whatever had passed he was in a mood of bitter rebellion. Perhaps they had ridiculed him for his facile submission.

They spent a few unhappy days at Naples. Letters came from Sorrento, and Rina learned to know Adrian's writing. She wondered if Markham

replied to these missives, but she believed that his sense of honor was too strong for such a course as that. Not a word more was said on the subject, but there had been also no attempt at a reconciliation. They went sight-seeing together, and outwardly there did not seem to be much amiss between the young couple. They drove together along that incomparable coast, with its views of sea and sky and of the beautiful outlines of Ischia and of Capri. But always she felt as if Markham—her Markham—were a thousand miles away, estranged and alienated. She felt, too, the atmosphere of cold pride that forbade him to speak.

In those first days of their honeymoon she had believed the contest finished, and now it seemed as if only the second round had been played. And she was losing; she was no longer quite so sure of her own strength, of her power of keeping Markham from the threatened danger.

Rina was convinced that the Guises' appearance at Sorrento had not been an accidental one. They must have heard that she and Markham were there and had deliberately sought him out. They were not going to lose him without a struggle. Rina was aware that the apostate is seldom content with his own apostasy; he is, on the contrary, the most violent and unscrupulous of proselytizers. He has evil things on his side, strong, violent, and malignant powers. He is astute and plausible as only the lapsed can be. All his old knowledge of grace and holiness is perverted and used to these new ends. Rina saw in Adrian a magnified force, immense, unscrupulous, determined. Markham, by his marriage with a Catholic, brought up in pious surroundings, had slipped out of his hands. But he was to be recalled; they were lying in wait for him. All the Catholic world of London had once looked askance at Mark-

ham Proctor as a man who had in a sense jeopardized his birthright. He was known as a friend of Adrian Guise's, and also as one of the most habitual frequenters of his house. The fact that he was an unmarried man of wealth, position, and importance, could not give Markham the entrée to strict Catholic houses. Rina was able to see these things with perfect clearness; before her marriage she had not minimized the danger which in her first happiness she believed to be at an end. Markham had the artistic temperament, and he lent himself very easily to exterior influences. He was impulsive, warm-hearted, easily stirred to anger. She had not been fundamentally disillusioned, for from the first there had been no illusions. She had always known what people said about Markham, and she knew, too, that those things had been justified. Before his marriage, Adrian Guise had deliberately tried to rob the young man of his faith. He had not as yet strayed, as Father Laurence had put it, but he was straying. The man who wrote "The Chessboard" could use subtle arguments, clever, insidious, terrible, and he would not scruple to use them. Markham had evinced an ever growing carelessness about his religion; one by one he gave up those little devout practices, which the man who loves his religion very deeply always cherishes. But with him the ties of heredity were sufficiently vigorous to resist an encroachment on the stronghold of faith itself; he had been educated to understand the sacrifices his forefathers had made for the Church. At first, he had gone to the Guises' house without fear, almost defiantly, stimulated by his growing admiration for Adrian's intellect. When his mother had objected he had laughed at her fears. And Adrian was very careful; he did not wish to frighten Markham away; he wanted the process

to be gradual, imperceptible, and very thorough. Then, one day, he would awake to that wonderful liberty that is the reward of the soul that has had the strength to free itself from all spiritual fetters and is enfranchized from all narrow religious dogmas. He would lend his youth, his intellect, his charm, to the work Adrian had set out to do. Adrian was as fanatical in his apostasy as a fakir. All strong men who have lent their strength to a particular cause desire disciples to lead and train. His must not be a sterile mission. The immense, phenomenal success of "The Chessboard" had fanned his enthusiasm to flame. His enemy was the Catholic Church, and he felt assured that in this enmity he had thousands of sincere sympathizers. The work of the Church was spreading; missions were springing up all over England; there had been the recent influx of exiled religious communities received and welcomed in England to her eternal honor. Adrian's was not a voice crying solitarily in the wilderness; his work found ready sympathizers, ready helpers. The book had made him comparatively a rich man. Little by little, he permitted the secret of his authorship to escape. He was engaged to Adelaide at that time. She had been attracted to him by his fearless speaking at a lecture given in a private house, and their marriage took place soon afterward. They were neither of them very young at the time, and they had had no children.

During those days at Naples the constraint between the Proctors became more glacial. Rina rose alone now to go to Mass in the early morning, for Markham never offered to accompany her. She came back, pale and tired, and took her early coffee in her room. They spent the mornings in sightseeing, the afternoons in driving, but all the charm had

departed from such expeditions. She felt in those days as if Markham had ceased to love her, and at the precise moment, when her own love for him had increased to a point she had not hitherto dreamed of. His very peril, and the imminence of it, had made him most passionately dear. Surely God would hear her prayers and give him back to her.

One morning she saw nothing at all of Markham. By the time she returned to the hotel, after Mass, he had already gone out, leaving no word for her. All the morning passed, and still he did not return. It was the first time he had left her thus completely alone, and she wondered what it might signify. The day was wet, and she stayed indoors until the midday breakfast. From the window of her bedroom she could hardly see the sea; the coast was completely blotted out, and the lovely shape of Ischia was invisible. Markham, careless of the weather, had gone for a long tramp. He was very restless and unquiet in those days, and in reality he was quite as unhappy as Rina.

He came into her room just before twelve o'clock, and, shutting the door, he went up to her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Look here, Rina, I simply can't stand this any more. I don't know what is the matter with you." He looked with a kind of resentment at her pale face. "Do you feel ill? If you do, for goodness' sake say so, and we'll go back to Florence. You *look* simply awful!"

"To Florence?" repeated Rina, as if she had not heard the questions about her health. The suggestion filled her with a kind of nervous terror. She had said nothing in her letters to her mother about the Guises' sudden appearance at the hotel at Sorrento, nor of her subsequent estrangement

with Markham. The truth was too bitter to be written, and then, at first, she had hoped the coldness would pass, and that they would be friends again. But to go back as they were, bitterly separated after a few weeks' honeymoon, would be a confession of failure that to Rina's proud spirit would have been unendurable. She could not meet her mother, and tell her how and why she had failed. She was Markham's wife, and her loyalty was of a fine and delicate quality. It seemed to her that she simply could not go back to her mother now and tell her that what she had feared had come to pass. Markham had seen his friends again, and instead of keeping away from them, as he could quite easily have done, he had deliberately sought out Adrian, had a long interview with him. These people were trying to win him back, and he was struggling savagely against the love that would have held him from them. To speak of her pain would have been equally impossible. She felt that she could only bear it at all as long as she was able to hide it in her own heart.

"Oh, Markham, we can't go back to Florence like this," she said with sudden courage.

"Like what?" He looked at her sharply.

"As we are now. Oh, you know quite well what I mean."

"You mean you don't want them to know so soon that you've made a mistake?"

She rose and came a little nearer.

"Have I made a mistake?" she said.

"Judging by your very dismal looks, I should say you had."

His eyes, hard and bright, gazed pitilessly at her. Unhappiness had certainly dimmed the splendor of her beauty.

She was paler and thinner than the joyous-look-

ing girl he had married, nay, than the radiant wife of those first glad weeks. Her eyes were heavy—perhaps she had been crying at night—and the dark stains under them made them look unnaturally large. But he felt little compunction. The suffering was mutual, and he assured himself that the fault was chiefly hers. She had taken him away from his friends who, whatever their religious views, had always shown him charity and sympathy.

"Couldn't we go to Stones?" she suggested feebly.

"You mean—you won't mind if my mother knows?"

"She'll understand—she won't need explanations," said Rina.

"A cheerful prospect for me!" said Markham, stung to irritation at the proposal. "I don't think I feel quite up to the very strenuous atmosphere of Stones just now."

"As we intend to live there, it seems to me that the sooner we settle down to the life there, the better. We both find this perpetual traveling trying. And Stones is our home."

"You'd never stand an English winter," he told her; "you can have no idea how dreary it is, especially in the country, when one doesn't care for sport. We neither of us hunt—there would be absolutely nothing to do."

"I am sure I should not find it dreary," she answered.

"Well, anyhow, we can't possibly go home without passing through Florence and saying good-by to your mother. So you had better make up your mind to go there sooner or later."

It was perfectly true, and she knew that to leave suddenly for England without going to Florence would necessitate an explanation which she did not wish to give. Whichever way she looked, there

was, metaphorically speaking, a *cul-de-sac,* made the more hopelessly impassable by Markham's determined attitude. There was a little pause.

But even the stormy little discussion had broken the ice; that glacial, frigid courtesy, which had seemed so hostile, had really been infinitely more painful. Rina recognized this; it gave her courage.

"Markham," she said, "we can't go on like this. You know we can't—it's dreadful for us both, and it's wrong. Can't you forgive me?" She went up to him and touched his hand timidly, remembering with a pang how confidently she had been accustomed to take it in hers, and how he had welcomed that caressing touch. His face grew less hard, and he did not take his hand away.

"Please forgive me, Markham. I am very unhappy, too. And I love you very much——" Her voice broke a little, the tears were swimming in her eyes, that looked now like deep pools. She was longing for him to speak. "Don't you care any more?" she went on. "You seemed to find it so easy to care at first. Is it so difficult now?"

He looked at her steadily. She was beautiful, and she was suffering. She loved him, and his continued coldness and hostility were hurting her. Her little appeal touched him.

"Rina, darling," he said brokenly.

He held out his arms, she crept into them; she hid her face on his breast. But he lifted it gently with his hand and kissed her as it seemed to her he had never kissed her before, murmuring words of passionate love.

And thus their second reconcilation was effected. But the estrangement seemed always to Rina to have left a little scar upon her heart that would dread an infliction of another wound in the same place. She loved Markham more than ever, but she also feared

him more, and felt less certain to him, even of his love. There was danger still for him, and he needed all her prayers.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN they arrived at the old Ubinaldi palace, Helen saw only the blissfully happy honeymoon couple she had so confidently expected to find. Rina was absolutely silent on the subject of the episode at Sorrento.

But, deep in her heart, there was a little fear which was wont to spring up at the most unlikely moments and assail her with dread of the future. Supposing the plan of wintering in Capri should fall through, and should prove to be only one of those idle dreams in which people who are aimlessly traveling sometimes indulge? Supposing, however, that this should happen and Adrian and his wife should arrive at the villa at Fiesole sooner than they had originally intended? Sometimes Rina almost felt as if her very dread of it would cause their coming to materialize. Another struggle, such as she had had at Naples, might make shipwreck of her happiness.

It was soon settled that she and Markham were to remain for, at any rate, a few weeks in Florence. The old prince wished it, for he missed Rina's shining young presence more than he liked to say. Helen, too, was anxious to have her daughter near her, and, as Mrs. Proctor had already packed up and gone to Egypt, Stones was shut up, and there seemed no real necessity for their immediate return to England.

Markham readily fell in with this suggestion, for

the life at the old palace was exactly to his liking. He and Rina had their own apartment, a large, very sunny one with half a dozen rooms and big windows looking down from a great height upon the Arno. They had their meals with the old prince and Helen, but otherwise they were perfectly independent. Rina, who was less favorably disposed to the plan, made no opposition.

There was much to be said in favor of their remaining in Florence for the present. The old prince was in failing health; since the summer there had been a great change in him. He had missed his granddaughter, and, now that he had forgiven her for marrying an Englishman and for not marrying Toni Delfini, he was even more fond of her than he had been before. The presence of a younger man also cheered him. He liked Markham, who was a patient and cheery listener to his longest stories of people who had been perhaps dead and gone for more than half a century.

Markham, too, found much to amuse and entertain him in Florence. He discovered many kindred spirits among the younger colony of English artists and writers, who had settled in the City of Flowers. He soon began to work again, stimulated by the sight of others industriously employed, and his work was better and more serious than it had been since he had made the copies in the galleries for the chapel at Stones. Both he and Rina seemed perfectly happy and satisfied. And, when Helen saw them kneeling side by side at Mass in the little chapel at the old palace, she felt that Rina had been abundantly justified in her choice, and justified, too, in accepting the risk that had filled every one else with so much anxiety.

Rina saw what was for her an entirely new side of Florentine life—the English side. She and Mark-

ham were much sought after, and they lunched and dined out frequently. Markham was delighted at the admiration his young wife evoked wherever she went. She was more lovely than ever that first winter of her marriage. She and Maria Binaldi saw a good deal of each other, for they had resumed something of their old friendship on a new footing. Besides, Markham liked Maria, and they often lunched with her at the Delfini palace. She amused him, and she often accompanied them sightseeing, for she knew Florence by heart. And she was just the kind of clever, frank, sophisticated woman that attracted Markham. They had not as yet seen Toni, for he still spent most of his time in the country.

One day, however, when Maria had invited them to luncheon, they found, to their surprise, that Toni was one of the party. It was the first time that he and Rina had met since her marriage. He came into the room a few minutes after their arrival. Bowing low, he kissed Rina's hand, and then was presented to Markham. He looked a good deal older since the spring, Rina thought, though perhaps it was only in contrast to her husband's gay youthfulness. But there was certainly more gray in his hair and in his carefully trimmed beard. Markham was astonished at his elderly aspect, and wondered why he could ever have been regarded as a suitable *parti* for Rina. He had always felt a secret jealousy of the eminently eligible Toni, but that feeling swiftly vanished when he beheld him in the flesh. He seemed so utterly without his sister's charm, and Markham secretly dubbed him a stick.

When they were seated at luncheon, Maria turned suddenly to Markham and said:

"I met some friends of yours yesterday, Mr. Proctor—they were asking about you."

"Friends of mine?" Markham both looked and was frankly puzzled. But Rina felt a quick little stab of fear; she turned with an anxious look to Maria Binaldi.

"English people," said Maria unconcernedly, "a Mr. Guise and his wife. Very charming and agreeable people, but not your sort at all, my dear Rina—you would be shocked to death at them! They are not at all *bien-pensant,* and Mr. Guise has written a book that is on the Index, so they are really just the kind of people one would expect to meet at the Emminsons where, in fact, they were having tea. But I know so many pious and excellent people that it is quite a relief sometimes to talk to those who are not!"

She chattered on in her gay, half-malicious way, and she did not notice the silence of her guests, nor the change that had come over their faces. Rina was as white as if she had suddenly seen a specter of peculiarly malevolent aspect. Markham, on the other hand, had reddened and looked singularly uncomfortable.

"I know them, of course," he said after a moment's pause, "but my wife has never met them."

"Oh, Rina would be shocked, as I said just now—she would certainly smell sulphur if she found herself in the room with them!" said Maria laughing. "But he is very entertaining. I remember reading his book—it made a sensation at the time. Toni, you read 'The Chessboard,' didn't you?"

"No, I did not," said Toni with unusual emphasis; "you know quite well, Maria, that I never read books that are on the Index, nor do I have them in the house." He paused for a moment, and then, turning to Markham, he said sharply: "The

author of 'The Chessboard' is a friend of yours?"

"Yes—I knew them very well before my marriage," said Markham stiffly. He felt that Delfini was surprised at the admission, and was secretly criticizing him.

"They are only staying with the Emminsons' till the villa is ready. They have been lent a little furnished one at Fiesole for the winter and spring," explained Maria Binaldi.

"I wish you would not go to the Emminsons', Maria," said Antonio. He very seldom interfered with his sister's actions, but he heartily disliked her intimacy with these people. Mrs. Emminson had been divorced by her first husband, and they had come to Florence in the hope of finding doors less hermetically sealed against them than they had been in London. They were rich, and had gathered around them a little coterie of kindred spirits by no means unsoiled and therefore the less inclined to throw stones. In most foreign towns there can be found a little English underworld of the kind, severely disregarded by the "English colony." Maria Binaldi, often bored and eager for novelty, enjoyed flying in the face of her friends' prejudices, and was wont to declare that she liked Mrs. Emminson, and that there were plenty of excuses to be made for her.

"My brother is terribly old-fashioned," she explained to Markham, for she did not enjoy being reproved by Toni in front of other people.

"One need not be exceptionally straitlaced to disapprove of Mrs. Emminson," Delfini rejoined severely.

"I confess I have never met any one so broad-minded as Mrs. Guise," continued Maria. "The only thing she seemed to disapprove of at all is the number of priests she sees in Italy. It never oc-

curred to me before—I suppose I am accustomed to them—and I pointed out to her that there are also an unusual number of churches, and at most of them there are a great many Masses said every morning. She only looked at me and said, 'How *pitiable!*' I couldn't help laughing. Still, as I said, they are not *bien-pensant,* and I did not expect them to be. I take a holiday when I go to the Emminsons'!"

"I advise you not to visit these friends of yours while they are staying with the Emminsons," said Conte Delfini, turning to Markham, and speaking as a much older man might speak when offering advice to a younger one. "It is not a *milieu* you would care for at all, nor would Donna Rina."

"Oh, Rina would certainly have to take some holy water with her if she went there!" said Maria laughing. "But tell me about the Guises, Mr. Proctor; are they well off?"

"They used not to be, but he made a great deal out of 'The Chessboard'," answered Markham in a measured tone.

"He is not a Catholic, I suppose? One felt that he really knew a good deal about it—more than most people who write against the Church."

"He used to be one," said Markham; "he is not anything now."

"Then certainly Rina must not meet him," said Maria. "Fortunately they will be well out of the way at Fiesole—one need never go there. They are not the sort of people you can have at the *palazzo,* are they, Rina? But they spoke of you very affectionately, Mr. Proctor, and said they hoped to see you."

"Did they?" said Markham.

"There are sometimes reasons that make it ex-

pedient for a man to give up his old friends when he is married," observed Conte Delfini.

There was a little pause then, and Maria wondered why Toni was so disagreeable and disapproving to-day; he was behaving as if he did not like Markham. Perhaps he was jealous of him because Markham had stepped in and won so easily what Toni had failed to win.

Markham, too, felt the censure in the older man's tone, and the advice he had just given him touched a sore spot. He was irritated that Delfini should judge and condemn these friends of his, and disapprove, as he evidently did, of his sister's having made their acquaintance. In this matter he would be very strongly ranged upon Rina's side. This thought angered Markham, and a steel-like glint came into his blue eyes.

But why had they come to Florence so soon? This was only January, and they had talked vaguely of going to Fiesole in the spring. He was even annoyed with himself for feeling so dismayed at the news. He could not possibly avoid seeing them—they might run across each other almost any day in the street—and Rina would be certain to make a fuss if he went to see them. It was all uncomfortable situation for every one, and he wished Maria Binaldi had been less explicit in her lively account of them. And they had asked after him—had expressed a hope to see him. They were evidently perfectly acquainted with his presence in Florence.

Perhaps she was a little sorry herself that she had spoken so frankly, for Toni did not seem at all inclined to let the subject drop, and he now turned once more to Markham.

"As you are not very well acquainted with Florence," he said, fixing his lusterless, melancholy eyes

upon Markham, "you will perhaps forgive me for being so impertinent as to advise you. You must not go by my sister; she is a law unto herself—are you not, Maria? But, to be frank, it is not to the Emminsons, nor to the Guises, that the granddaughter of Prince Ubinaldi should go."

"Surely I am the best judge whether my wife is to know my friends or not," said Markham, wondering for the first time if Toni could be aware of the promise that had been exacted from him before his marriage.

"In England—in London—I should not attempt to advise you. I imagined, however, that Catholics are as strict there as they are here, perhaps even more strict. But, in Florence, I can tell you what would be said—what would be thought—if Donna Rina were to be seen in such circles. We belong to the Black Party, that puts the Church before all. And we do not play with fire. While Donna Rina remains in Florence she belongs to her grandfather's set—to the friends of his house and his family, people with kindred sympathies in religion and politics."

Markham's face cleared; he thought Toni quite depressingly serious, and he made an attempt to put the matter on a lighter footing.

"Well, I certainly don't want to take my wife anywhere where she will imagine she smells sulphur or would want to sprinkle me with holy water," he said, adopting Maria Binaldi's flippant words. Although he spoke a little recklessly, his smile was charming, frank, and open as a boy's. "And I should be dreadfully sorry if I shocked the prince. Between you and me, I think he's very easily shocked, and I should like to let a little fresh air into the palace!"

"He would certainly have a fit if he thought that

Rina had been to the Emminsons'," said Maria; "he has heard of them, of course, but I doubt if he has ever heard of Mr. Guise."

Markham was satisfied from this speech that Maria, at any rate, was ignorant of those conditions laid down by the old prince before his granddaughter's marriage could take place.

"I should not dream of going to the Emminsons', " said Rina, who, up till that moment, had kept silence. She added with courage: "Nor to the Guises'."

Toni's attitude was a source of support to her; it gave her the requisite temerity to make this speech.

"My dear, you're married now," said Maria, "and you'll have to meet all kinds of people. You can't shut yourself up in a glass case, and you ought to be thankful that you can't. Most of us marry to get a little freedom!"

"But I don't want freedom of that kind—the freedom to go to places my mother would object to," said Rina smiling.

"Very excellent dutiful sentiments, my dear, but you are exactly one thousand and one years behind the times," replied Maria briskly.

They were all four unconsciously taking sides, Markham and Maria, Toni and Rina. But to herself Maria was thinking: "I was quite right, she would have made Toni an ideal wife; she is prim and old-fashioned enough even for him. But she'll bore this charming modern young man to death in a few months." She almost pitied Markham.

"I really wonder how you will settle it," she said airily. "Shall you let her have her own way and snub your old friends, as Toni advises?"

There was a little malice in her smile as she turned to Markham, for she had not yet forgiven

Rina for refusing Toni, and she enjoyed the opportunity of making her feel a little uncomfortable.

"A Protestant husband has one enormous advantage over a Catholic one," said Markham, "for his wife has to promise to obey him. With us, alas, it isn't so. Rina always does what she likes, and very often I obey her. That is why we get on so perfectly!"

His touch of sarcasm did not escape Toni, who was rather surprised at it. It must be said that neither he nor his sister were in the least aware that this problem of Markham's friends had almost been instrumental in preventing his marriage with Rina. They did not know it was an ancient and sore subject whose traces were scored already upon these young people's pasts like deep wounds. It was for this reason that Rina was unable to adopt the light and flippant tone which the occasion seemed to demand, since it is impossible to expose one's own secret and private tragedies at a luncheon party. She envied Markham his power of detachment. He could talk about it lightly as if the question of the Guises had never threatened to come permanently and tragically between them. But when he said in that sarcastic tone: "That is why we get on so perfectly," she felt as if he had dealt her a little stinging blow in the face.

"That's a very pretty little villa they have been lent," said Maria. "I know it well; there is a garden and a small *podere,* and a splendid view. It is worth seeing, if only for the view. But I am tantalizing you, Rina, for I am sure you will never go and look at it. You know all the views so well, though, that it won't be such a deprivation to you as it will be to Mr. Proctor."

"Oh, no doubt I shall see it," said Markham,

who did not at all want Maria to think that he was too submissive. "I adore looking at views, especially when there is a sunset. And then neither of the Guises will ever look at it unless there is some one there to point it out to them. When he is at work he never leaves his writing-table, and she never leaves the typewriter. She types every word he writes."

Rina was thankful when luncheon was at an end; it had been to her a very long and rather agitating meal, and her consternation at learning that the Guises were already in Florence had been very great. She wished that she and Markham had fulfilled their original intention of going to Stones, but she had felt it would be selfish both to her mother and grandfather to insist upon this.

Maria suggested that Toni should take Markham to the picture-gallery, which he had never seen.

"It is nothing wonderful," she told him, "but there are one or two things you ought to see. Toni, remember I told you that Mr. Proctor is an artist. You will find us in my *salotto* when you want us, and, in the meantime, Rina and I will talk over old times."

She linked her arm in Rina's with a gesture of affection. Rina married to a young and brilliant man, and her beauty now the subject of considerable comment, was of far greater importance than the rather shy girl she had once befriended on Toni's account. But she was still at a loss to understand why Rina should have refused Toni and married Markham. Antonio would have suited her perfectly, and her married life would then have formed a perfect sequence to her girlhood. She would have led the quiet, sheltered, rather domestic life of the pious "Black" Italian lady, and she would have

been perfectly contented, thinking of little beyond her husband and her children, her religion and her works of charity. She would have gone only to houses where she would have met women of that same type, and she would certainly never have mixed with the Mrs. Emminsons and the Adrian Guises of this world. Why had she strayed into these wide and open spaces where freedom of thought and conduct was not only condoned, but encouraged?

"Well, my dear, you have become quite an Englishwoman," said Maria, surveying her with her bold dark eyes, before whose scrutiny the girl shrank a little. She had not desired this interview alone with Maria, and she was afraid of being probed and questioned. Like all people with a hidden wound, she feared the very sight of the scalpel. "I suppose it was always in you, and the English husband has developed it. Well, he is very handsome and clever, the English husband, and, of course, you are still absurdly in love with him!"

"Is it so absurd?" inquired Rina laughing.

"No, but it astonishes me. I thought you were as cold as ice, and that you would never fall in love with anybody! But you must not be too strict and severe with him, for you must remember that he has not been brought up as you have been. Everything in England is much more mixed than it is with us, and you will have to learn to put up with the mixture whether you like it or not!"

Rina was silent; she knew that Maria was alluding to this friendship of Markham's, and she wanted less than ever to discuss it.

"Men always know quantities of people their wives wouldn't approve of," went on Maria, "unless, of course, they are dreadfully proper and old-

fashioned, like dear old Toni. But his kind will soon be as extinct as the dodo!"

"But can't you realize," said Rina, with sudden passion, for she was astonished at the wilful obtuseness of Maria, "that Mr. Guise is an enemy of the Church? He is an apostate himself, and his wife is violently opposed to religion in any form, but most of all to the Catholic religion. She thinks that all people ought to be free to do exactly as they wish, to judge for themselves whether a thing is good or evil. Naturally I don't want to know them, nor do I want Markham to go there. They are dangerous. And please—please, don't encourage him to go there!"

"If you will take my advice," said Maria coolly, "you will do nothing to try to stop him. You can't expect a young and clever man like your husband to remain always tied to your apron-strings."

"Can't you understand?" Rina began helplessly. She felt that in such a crisis as this Maria should have given her all the support one woman could give to another.

"Oh, but I do most perfectly understand. Dangerous to faith—isn't that the idea? But do remember your husband wasn't brought up in the Ubinaldi palace! It's always hazardous for a wife to veto a man's old friends. You're not jealous, are you, Rina?"

"I am not at all jealous," said Rina proudly. "People are sure to say that I am, though."

"Yes, they are. That's why I advise you to take it quietly and not make a fuss."

"If you were to see a person being slowly poisoned—a person you cared for very much—wouldn't you try to interfere?"

"I should try not to make the antidote too nasty,"

smiled Maria wickedly. She thought that Rina was making a mountain out of a mole-hill. "Mr. Guise was perfectly charmed when I told him I had read 'The Chessboard.' He thought me very broad-minded, especially as it's on the Index."

Rina's heart sank; she almost wished she had not spoken to Maria quite so frankly. Markham would receive nothing but this careless encouragement from Contessa Binaldi.

"He said he would like to send me a copy of his new book when it comes out—he hopes to finish it while he is at Fiesole. It is not a novel, but a kind of philosophical treatise on belief. He is going to call it 'Back from Rome.' Mrs. Guise and Mrs. Emminson both say it is a most wonderful piece of work—lucid and convincing. Now, Rina, don't look so shocked. I'm not a lost sheep, really, though I don't set up to be pious."

But Rina shrank away. It seemed to her as if Maria Binaldi from wilful carelessness and negligence had lost all sense of spiritual things. Guise, in his cold and deliberate apostasy, had not shocked her at all. She had been delighted that he should compliment her upon being a broad-minded woman who found pleasure in his books.

"You know you are almost absurdly like Toni," said Maria, "and I can not imagine why you refused to marry him."

"I didn't love him," said Rina. To her the explanation seemed a simple one.

"Love!" repeated Maria; "you talk like a child. You will find that sympathy of ideas lasts much longer than love, and makes the adventure of marriage a much safer one. If you had been ten years older you would have known this. But Mr. Proctor is very handsome—I am not surprised you fell in love with him—at first sight, wasn't it? And if

he satisfied you as a Catholic, besides—no doubt you thought of all that." She stopped and looked at Rina with piercing eyes. "When one is violently in love that is sometimes apt to become a secondary consideration. Yet one is always surprised when a very pious Catholic woman marries a man who is a Protestant."

"Markham is a good Catholic, and I want him to remain one," said Rina; "he nearly always comes to Mass with me in the morning."

"You have him well in hand, then, my dear little Rina," said Maria teasingly.

"I don't know what you mean—you have never talked like this to me before," said Rina, feeling as if a new and unpleasant light were being thrown upon the disposition of Contessa Binaldi.

"You were only a little girl. I had some regard for your susceptibilities. And I didn't want to frighten you away—I wanted you to marry Toni."

At that moment the door opened and Toni and Markham came into the room. Both wore grave faces, and Markham looked thoroughly bored, as if he had not been enjoying himself. Rina recognized with a pang of disappointment that the two men were not congenial to each other. And she had wished them to be friends; she felt that Toni would have had a good influence over Markham. He was a man to whom his religion was almost a passion, and Rina knew that this was perhaps his chief reason in seeking her for a wife; he was aware of that careful Catholic training she had received in the old Ubinaldi palace.

It was time for Markham and herself to take leave of their host and hostess, and they both went away feeling that the visit had not been altogether a success.

CHAPTER XXIII

"I LIKE your friend Maria Binaldi," said Markham, as they walked home along the Lung'Arno.

It was a very clear and bright winter's day, and the long, brown woods of the Cascine were softly stenciled against the brilliant turquois of the sky. Far off, the Carrara Mountains, their sharp outlines covered with fresh snow, looked like immense icebergs in a sea of blue. The river ran jade-colored under the old bridges. There was a heady freshness in the air, the wind had a pure, cold quality, almost Alpine in its invigorating effect.

"But I don't care for Delfini," he went on; "he is a stick and something of a prig."

"I used to think he was rather a stick," admitted Rina, "but he is very good—very sincere."

"I am astonished to find that such an intimate friend of your own should have ventured into the Forbidden Land," said Markham with careless sarcasm. "It seems I'm not the only person to think you a little narrow-minded on the point."

"Maria has always made a point of knowing every one. When there was a rage for theosophy she used to go to the lectures. It's because she likes to be in the *mouvement,* and is afraid of being left out."

"She must find it very dull living with that bore of a brother. I wonder she has not married again."

"I think her marriage wasn't very happy," said Rina.

"And you think an unhappy marriage would make a woman desist from a second venture?" he inquired.

Rina paused. "I don't know. But Maria likes to be free. Toni is very unselfish, and she does just what she likes—the house always seems more hers than his. I have never heard him find fault with her before as he did to-day."

Markham had privately believed that Conte Delfini's reproof had been directed quite as much to himself as to Maria Binaldi. He walked on quickly with easy, swinging strides. He felt young and alive to-day, strong and full of eager ambition. Rina had some difficulty in keeping up with him. The cold winter air failed to brace her, and gave her a feeling of fatigue and lassitude to which she was unaccustomed.

At last Markham came to a halt. His face was a little grim.

"I say, Rina," he began, "I don't know how on earth I'm going to avoid Adrian and his wife. They'll think it so queer of me if I never go near them. But we musn't quarrel again—I've made up my mind to that. Only I want to ask you this. Can't you trust me? Can't you see I'm not the weak idiot you used to think?"

"Markham, I know you are not weak. But if you really cared for your Church you wouldn't want to go among people where it was always being abused. Isn't it wanting in loyalty? And Mr. Guise is writing a book called 'Back from Rome'—Maria told me so. The man is an apostate, and he wants to make others apostatize; he is devoting his whole life to it. Lots of Catholics refuse to meet apostates—I'm not the only one. You saw that Toni didn't like his sister to know them."

"I saw that Toni was a most insufferable prig," said Markham.

He looked at Rina.

"So you won't meet me half way?" he said.

She shook her head. "You know I can't. Oh—for every reason imaginable!"

"I was a fool to make that promise!" he said violently.

"But if you hadn't——" She stopped short.

"You mean you wouldn't have married me?"

"I mean I *couldn't* have married you."

"Oh, you would have come around, all right. People in love always do," he assured her.

Was it true, then, as Maria had suggested, that a great human love so often weakened the claims of religion?

"No," she said steadily; "you make a mistake—I shouldn't have married you. I was ready to make the sacrifice."

"My dear Rina, all this is beside the point. We are married, and we don't get on better or worse than hundreds of other people. You can't keep me to a promise made under stress of circumstances—it wouldn't be fair. You must let me choose my own friends, and you shall choose yours. I don't care for Delfini, and I think it was cheek of an elderly man like that wanting to marry you. But I'm not going to make a fuss when you go there. And you mustn't expect me to turn my back on old friends who aren't quite to your liking, but who have shown me more kindness than I can say. You've been brought up to smell sulphur and brimstone, so I won't ask you to know them. I see the impossibility of presenting them to your people since the age of the millennium has not yet arrived. But you mustn't try to keep me like a baby in arms."

Rina said nothing. She felt more helpless than ever—as helpless as if she had been trapped. The memory of that past bitter quarrel kept her now from further argument. She knew that she had sustained then a moral defeat, and she had made Markham impatient of restraint. To let him go to the Guises without an effort to stop him assuredly made for peace. But then—the hideous danger—the risk he must necessarily run—all seemed to clutch at her heart. She saw in the coming of these people

to Florence a determined attempt to destroy her happiness. And their own departure for Stones seemed to have been indefinitely postponed, Markham never alluded to it now.

In the weeks that followed there was no mention of the Guises. Whether Markham saw them or not Rina could not tell, but he was often absent-minded and preoccupied as if his thoughts were elsewhere. He worked less regularly, less steadily. He was not so often at hand to accompany her on her walks and drives, and they lunched and dined out less frequently.

At the end of February there was a delicious interval of warm and spring-like weather. The hills began to show that soft veiling of green that is so fragile and delicate a thing. Drifts of almond blossom and mimosa lent color to the gardens around Florence. And still more wonderful were the flowers that were sold in the streets, masses of carnations and immense bunches of violets, and the silver and pink of fruit blossom. Markham often took his sketching things into the country; he spent long days out of doors, and often did not return till dusk was falling. Rina felt a little lonely, but the work he brought back was delicious, and she was glad to think he was beginning to find pleasure in it again. She was not exactly dull, for she was a great deal with her mother, who watched her a little anxiously. Rina had slipped back almost into her old place.

The fine bright spell lasted well into March; there were days of quite surprising heat. And it was during that bout of warm weather that the old prince had a very sudden stroke of paralysis. Rina going into his sitting room just before tea one afternoon, found him lying back in his chair breathing in a loud, gasping manner that alarmed her. She

saw that his face was purple, and had become a little twisted. Rina ran for assistance, summoning the valet and then calling to her mother. The doctor was telephoned for. The old palace was strangely astir; its long quiet was broken by perpetually hurrying footsteps, as if preparations were being made for the welcome of an important guest. Markham had gone out for the day, and Rina found herself longing for his return.

The old man, speechless and helpless as a baby, was put to bed, and two nuns came to assist in the task of nursing him. The fine and vigorous life that had weathered the suns and storms of nearly eighty-two years had been felled to the ground like a mighty oak. But there was life still, and the doctor did not think that death would supervene quickly. He might even have some years of life, but it was doubtful whether he would ever recover speech or sense.

Markham was shocked to hear the ill news, when he returned home that evening just as the spring dusk was falling upon Florence. He had genuinely liked the old man, although he had often thought of him as having stepped out of some ancient, bygone period, clinging almost pathetically to its ways and opinions. But then the whole atmosphere of the palace was like that, and it had made Rina just what she was—charming, unusual, dignified, but a little too far removed from the workaday world. Markham thought it might prove easier to change his wife in certain things when they had returned to England. As long as she was in Florence she could not be expected to shake off the idiosyncrasies that were the results of her upbringing, her environment. Not that he had the slightest wish to go to Stones at present, and this illness provided a very

excellent excuse for their remaining in Florence so that Rina could be of use to her mother.

For a few days Markham was at hand to help if they desired his help, and Helen saw her son-in-law in a new and very agreeable light. In the sick-room he was all patience and attention, and he volunteered to watch at those hours when the other attendants were resting, showing himself especially anxious to relieve Rina and Helen. Helen, who had always liked Markham, felt more as if he belonged to the house than she had ever done before. There were many little things that seemed to demand a man's attention, and as far as he was able to do so, Markham stepped into the breach and accomplished them.

Sometimes he would come into the sick-room when Rina was sitting there, and going up to her, would lay his hand on her shoulder and say in an authoritative way: "Now go and rest, darling." He would go with her to the door and kiss her before she left the room. Once or twice Helen saw this little interlude being enacted, and it took away all her mistrust of Markham as a weak, unbalanced man, such as she had feared he might prove. There was no doubt about his tender devotion to Rina, and it seemed to deepen rather than to diminish as time went on. Helen went out so little that she had never even heard that the Guises had arrived in Florence. She was inclined to ascribe a physical cause to Rina's languid, rather sad look during those warm weeks of spring.

To tell the truth, Rina had never been happy about Markham during that time which immediately preceded her grandfather's illness. He had displayed a love of solitude, a restlessness, a curious energy that made her anxious about him. And although he never once mentioned the Guises, she had

a strong inward suspicion that he visited them. He did not tell her, because, as he had said, he did not want to quarrel with her about it. He was mysterious about those sketching expeditions, and once when she offered to accompany him, he made some excuse for leaving her behind, saying he did not think the weather would hold up. Now it seemed to her that he was eager to make amends for those past prolonged absences, and to show her that he shared her anxiety. But for whatever reason he had come back, she was only too thankful to welcome him; she was even a little ashamed of that suspicion of hers, feeling that perhaps after all she had misjudged him. This was the Markham she did most tenderly love.

It was Rina herself who persuaded him one day to take his sketching things and go into the country for the day.

"You have been indoors so much all this past fortnight," she said, "you'll knock yourself up, Markham. You've had hardly any exercise. And it's such a perfect day—I wish I could come with you."

Markham demurred at first—he was perfectly fit, and he did not want her to overdo herself. He was sure she would exert herself too much unless he were there to prevent it. But she overruled all his objections, and finally, admitting that he wanted to finish a sketch, Markham started off with his paraphernalia.

It was the beginning of his slipping back into the old ways that had caused her anxiety. But had she not herself persuaded him to go? She had felt that the perpetual atmosphere of the sick-room might prove boring for a young, active man. She had a strong feeling that Markham ought not to be sacrificed, as in the first days he had seemed so eager to be

sacrificed, accepting it all as part of his duty, and often undertaking far more than he need have done. Rina tried not to suspect anything even when he had spent four or five consecutive days away from the old palace, returning only in time to dress for dinner.

"Isn't Markham back yet?" Helen asked one evening when she met Rina on the stairs dressed to go out.

"No—he said he mightn't be back till dinner time. He is sketching, you know, and he likes to wait for the evening light. I am going for a little walk. I feel I want some air."

Rina was dressed in a long, dark blue coat trimmed with dark fur. It had a deep collar and cuffs as well as a flounce of the fur. It seemed to add to her height, and the darkness of the fur coming close to her face suited her to perfection.

"Don't stay out late, dear," said Helen, who could never quite accustom herself to the idea of Rina's walking about alone, although she was a married woman of some months' standing.

The evening was a little cold, and there was a touch of tramontana in the air that made Rina walk quickly to keep warm. The sun had not yet set, and the west was filled with a golden shimmer of light that turned rapidly to rose-color with little bars of dull green between. Everything was magnificently clear, as it so often is in Italy.

Rina walked along the Lung' Arno, and many people passed her in motors and carriages returning from the afternoon drive in the Cascine. Had she been near enough she might have heard such remarks as these: "Who is that tall, handsome girl?"—"Oh, that's young Mrs. Proctor—little Rina Ubinaldi"—"Yes, she's very good-looking, isn't she?"—"They're making a long stay in Flor-

ence—the old prince, her grandfather, is lying like a log—they say he'll never speak again."

Rina did not know what they said, but their staring glances assured her that she was being observed. And it gave her a little sense of fear—this feeling that people were looking at her, talking about her. She wondered if they were discussing her and Markham, speculating as to whether their marriage was happy or not, saying perhaps how seldom she and Markham were to be seen together.

It made her innocent little walk an almost significant action. She wished she had not chosen this crowded time to come here. She ought to have chosen a quieter hour for a stroll. But there had been so much to do all day, the opportunity had not offered itself. She could not leave the whole brunt of the management to Helen, whose occupations were so multiplied since the old man's illness.

"I am getting too sensitive to people's opinion," she thought to herself, never dreaming that in five cases out of six the curious glances were tributes to her glowing youth and beauty, which had never been so pronounced as now.

Then she looked up, and in the falling dusk that was already beginning to spread its dim purple webs over the city, she saw Toni Delfini coming toward her.

He lifted his hat, stopped, and shook hands with her.

"Good evening, Donna Rina. How is the prince to-day?"

"He is just the same, thank you. The doctor thinks there is not likely to be any change for a long time at least."

Antonio looked grave.

"You will be staying on here, then, to be with your mother?" he said.

"Oh, yes; I could hardly leave her now," answered Rina.

"And your husband?"

"He is perfectly happy in Florence. Soon he will be more Florentine than the Florentines—he is so in love with it," she said.

They walked on side by side. Rina had never before walked with Toni; the experience was a novel one.

"Mrs. Proctor, I wish to say something to you. May I?"

He had never before addressed her by her married name; it sounded a little strange.

"What is it you wish to say to me?" she said. Her throat was so dry she could hardly utter the words; she was trembling a little as if she were on the brink of some terrible revelation.

"I don't want to say anything to hurt you—I am sure you must know that. But I think you ought to be told that your husband is spending all his days at Fiesole with the Guises. My sister has been there once or twice—very much against my wishes, as I need hardly tell you—and on each occasion he was there. Mrs. Guise told her that now the palace has become, as she called it, such a dreary hospital, Mr. Proctor spends most of his time with them."

Rina stopped and put her hand on the low wall and looked at the Arno. It was like a flood of moving light, borrowing hues of jade and silver and rose from the evening sky. The towers and domes on the opposite side were faintly illuminated, but soon they, too, would be submerged in the dusky blue shadows. Yes, she had always known it, always feared it. She felt that she had known what Toni was going to tell her even before he spoke. But in spite of this, her heart sank with a cold sen-

sation of despair; she even felt a little faint as if she had received a shock.

"Of course, I know it is not by your wish nor with your knowledge that he should go there. But perhaps you can hardly realize the danger of this young, impressionable, imaginative man being thrown day after day in the company of such people as the Guises. Their hatred of the Catholic Church is very great—it is violent and active. And here, as a girl, you were in the quiet, old-fashioned set of people, who devoted themselves to their homes, their Church, their charities. You have not changed?"

"No, I have not changed," said Rina sadly. "I have tried to keep Markham from these friends of his—I did not know that he had been visiting them at Fiesole—he did not tell me, because he knew that it would distress me. You must not blame Markham," she went on hurriedly, afraid that even now she had been lacking in loyalty; "it is not altogether his fault. They follow us about—oh, I am sure of it! I have not said as much as this to any one before." She looked pitifully at Toni, whose face seemed dark and austere in the evening light.

"I was talking to Della Scala—you may know him, perhaps? He is not a man you could call squeamish—he is in the cosmopolitan set, but he is a good Catholic. And he says the Guises' views are fearful, and that Mr. Guise ought not to be tolerated by any Catholic. He was surprised to hear that my sister had been there. I have begged her not to go there again for the sake of example."

Rina looked white and upset. She hardly heard what he was saying.

"I must be going home," she said.

"When are you coming to see us?" asked Toni.

"I so seldom go anywhere now. I'm always busy —there is a great deal to do."

"You must not over-fatigue yourself—you are looking pale, Donna Rina."

"Am I?" She smiled. "We have had very anxious days, of course. My grandfather's illness was terribly sudden."

She said good-by to him then and walked quickly homeward. And as she approached the palace she saw Markham coming toward her.

"Why, Rina, where have you been, too, so late?"

"I was tired of being indoors—I went for a little walk."

"Alone?" he asked in some surprise.

"Who is there to go with me?" She hated herself for the little evasion, but she did not want Markham to know that she had been with Toni. He would inevitably ask what they had talked about, and that was the one thing she was not prepared to tell him.

"I don't like your walking about so late alone," said Markham with a frown.

"Of course, I wasn't allowed to do it as a girl. But now that I'm married—"

"But you should be in before it gets dark," he remonstrated.

"I started out rather late. I was busy," said Rina.

They entered the house together. Markham still appeared dissatisfied, for as they were going upstairs he said:

"Did you meet any one you knew?"

"Yes. I met Toni Delfini."

His face fell.

"Delfini?" he repeated. "Did you speak to him, Rina?"

"Yes, of course I did," said Rina. "I couldn't very well pass him without saying a word."

"What did he say?" asked Markham.

There was anxiety in his tone.

"I don't think he said anything that would—that would interest you," stammered Rina.

"He was alone? Contessa Binaldi was not with him?"

"No—he was quite alone."

They had reached the top of the gloomy, dimly lit staircase, and Rina paused as if she were a little out of breath with the effort.

She said almost impulsively:

"Markham, did you go to Fiesole to-day?"

Their eyes met.

"Is that what Delfini told you?" demanded Markham angrily.

"He told me that Maria had seen you there," said Rina.

"What right has he to gossip about me to you? You should be more loyal than to listen."

"I did not want to hear it," said Rina steadily. "I would rather not have known. But I guessed it all the time."

As he stood there looking at her, Markham thought she was looking more lovely than ever. Those dark bands of fur against the whiteness of her throat emphasized its fairness. He caught one of the little ungloved hands in his, and for the first time noticed with something of a pang how fragile it was.

He came closer. All the anger died out of his face.

"I wish you had not guessed," he said quietly; "I didn't want you to know. I love you, Rina—it hurts me to go against you." He spoke with a sorrow that touched her in spite of herself.

"Oh, Markham, why can't you keep your word to me, then?" she asked; but she did not take her

hand away, and her face was very near his in the empty hall.

He looked at her strangely.

"I can't explain—you wouldn't understand."

"Markham," she said, "before my grandfather was taken ill I intended to ask you to come back with me to Stones. Now it is impossible—I can't leave my mother. We can't go away and you—you are breaking my heart!"

"Oh, Rina darling, don't talk like that. I've really been only up there to sit with Adrian because Adelaide is ill in bed with bronchitis. I couldn't refuse to keep him company."

Rina released her hand and moved away. Oh, those hours he had spent alone with Guise, listening perhaps to extracts from his new book!

Markham followed her.

"Are you angry, Rina?"

"No, I don't think I'm angry." She looked at him in a puzzled, helpless way, almost as if he had been a stranger endowed with some deadly, merciless power to hurt her.

"It's just like Delfini to meddle and make mischief between us! What right has he to discuss me with you?"

"You're giving every one the right," she said coldly.

She went upstairs and passed along the passage to her room, leaving him standing there irresolutely as if he were uncertain whether he would follow her or not. He had not wanted her to go until he had kissed her, had tried to make friends. Markham ran lightly up the stairs and entered Rina's room. She was removing her heavy coat, and he took it from her and laid it upon a chair. Then he took her in his arms and kissed her. For the first time it

seemed to him that she was a little reluctant to submit to that reconciliation, as with kisses and caresses and broken stammering words he expressed his sorrow at having hurt her. What did it mean, this new attitude? She seemed almost relieved when he released her, and she had not said a word. Had she ceased to put any faith in his eager assurances of amendment? When all was said and done, he had certainly broken his promise to her, not once, but many, many times. But he had found innumerable reasons for doing so, and he continued to assure himself that he was too alive to the danger of Adrian's influence to run any risk from it. Rina had no cause to be afraid. Yet he was perfectly aware that Adrian Guise was in some slow, subtle way assuming that old ascendancy over his thoughts and opinions. Markham had refused to envisage this fact, yet he wondered now if Rina, with her quick perception, had observed it. Perhaps Delfini had suggested it to her. He must have spoken to her very plainly. And what right had he to speak at all? Was he still in love with her? And what had she said to him? Had she voiced those fears of hers? This train of thought maddened Markham. Blame of any kind was insupportable to his pride, and the suspicion that any one should censure him to Rina lashed him like a whip.

And this new touch of coldness in her manner, what did it mean? Did it mean that he was wearing down her patience, that one day he would come with reiterated promises, with entreaties for her forgiveness, and they would fall upon indifferent, perhaps unloving ears? What had Delfini counseled her to do? He began to blame Delfini for Rina's coldness.

He went quickly out of the room, leaving his wife standing there alone.

CHAPTER XXIV

MARKHAM rose and went out early on the following morning. The sunlight gilded faintly the castellated top of the old Ubinaldi palace, which in its five hundred years of existence had watched so many tragic happenings, and could perhaps regard with something of serene detachment the busy life of modern Florence that flowed along the busy thoroughfare below. He met but few people. A couple of men passed him, carrying boughs of peach-blossom and golden mimosa, and great bunches of carnations that made abrupt and vivid blots of color—emphasized by the surrounding gloom, for the streets were still in shadow—which were destined to provide spaces of brightness and beauty on the flower-stalls later in the day. A group of soldiers marched up the street in the direction of Lung' Arno. Rain had fallen in the night, and the pavements and roads with their great square cobbles were wet with a sticky dampness. The faint aroma of olive smoke, which is perceptible in every Italian town in the early morning before more vigorous odors have arisen to dispossess it, pervaded the air. Mingling with it there was a fresh, chill, and fragrant quality that seemed to speak intimately of the Tuscan countryside that lay beyond Florence, whose villages are indeed but exquisite suburbs of the Flower Town, a girdle pale and gleaming to enchain her own arresting, immortal loveliness.

Under Giotto's Tower, the "Marble Lily of the Lily Town," he stood and waited for the tram which was to convey him to Fiesole. He carried his sketching things under his arms, for he had work to finish when he got there. It was for the last time, he told himself. That scarcely perceptible withdrawal of Rina's last evening had alarmed him. It was Delfini's fault—Delfini had made the mis-

chief, doubtless for reasons of his own. He might have known that Maria Binaldi would not hold her tongue. People were bound to gossip at finding any one from the Ubinaldi palace in the house of Adrian Guise. And he was sick of the whole thing, and all last night the thought of his own perfidy had kept him awake and restless. He saw that it might eventually separate him from Rina—Rina, who had shrunk a little from his embrace last night. She had told him she was not angry, but he was breaking her heart. And she had always guessed.

He took his seat in the tram and was soon being borne swiftly along the narrow Via dei Servi. A halt was made by the wide steps of the Innocenti where Della Robbia's delicious babies smile down from their bright blue shields. Then on again, down the Via Gino Capponi till they came in sight of the hill of Fiesole, rising abrupt and gray, with its lines of sharp black cypresses that conveyed an impression almost of mourning. The fragile green on plane and poplar showed with delicate thrift of effect. The hillsides were strewn with fruit blossom, a foam of rose-pink and silver-white, brilliant against the gray of the olives that is so soft and beautiful a color—the very gray of clouds. There was a wholesome scent of wet earth as the tram began to mount the hill whence Markham could look back and see the town lying in its morning mist of silver and Val d'Arno outspread beyond, a glimmer of young green cut by the pale shining sward of the river. On the honey-colored walls of many an old villa nestling in its grove of cypress and ilex-trees the first roses were visible.

Before the tram reached Fiesole Markham alighted and turned along a lane between high, white walls, fringed with pink roses and opening, purple irises. He walked until he came to some high iron

gates, through which he passed, and from thence a short avenue with twin rows of cypresses shadowing it, led up to the small, white villa beyond. In the loggia he could see Adrian's figure sitting at a writing-table, the morning sun pouring its warmth upon him. He looked up and then rose and came forward to greet Markham.

"You're an early bird to-day, Mark."

"Yes. I wanted to catch the sun on those olive-trees," said Markham, putting down his sketching things.

Adrian rang a little hand-bell. "You shall have some coffee," he said; "I haven't had mine—we'll have it here. Sit down, Mark."

He began to arrange his papers. Evidently he had been at work from a very early hour, for there was already quite a little heap of writing-paper covered with Adrian's small and meticulous handwriting.

Coffee was brought, and the two men sat down to the little meal. There were rolls and butter and golden honey, and Markham ate ravenously after his early start. Then he leaned back in his chair, put his arms behind his head, and said:

"Delfini's given me away. His sister said she'd met me here. Why do women talk so?"

"They have nothing else to do," replied Adrian with a frown. "All the same I have recommended you to be perfectly open about your comings and goings. You must teach your wife not to interfere with you—she is very young. Of course, there will be scenes and tears at first. I don't myself think you'll have much peace till you have taken her home and released her from the trammels of the Catholic atmosphere that surrounds her in Florence. Otherwise you'll be caught in those chains yourself and become the laughing-stock of all sensible men."

Markham wondered if he should ever find courage to say what he had come to say. He was more afraid of Adrian than of Rina at that moment.

"How is Adelaide?" he inquired, wishing to change the subject.

"She is better, but she had toothache last night—I gave her some chloroform, and she slept well. She's still drowsy," he added.

"Chloroform?" repeated Markham in an astonished tone.

"Well, why not? Why should she suffer when there is a remedy at hand? We always use it," he said indifferently.

"You might take an overdose. Things might happen."

Adrian shrugged his shoulders.

"We have no fear of bogies, Adelaide and I."

Adrian lit a cigarette and pushed the box toward Markham.

"You know, Mark, I think it's your duty to set your wife free," he said at last. "If you can't get her to give up her religion altogether, you can at least prevail upon her to become an indifferent Catholic. She is the victim of the atmosphere that has enwrapped her all her life."

Markham looked at him, and it seemed to him that across the fine wreaths of cigarette-smoke Guise's face was curiously malignant.

"I don't think I want to set her free—like that," he said. "And I'm quite sure of one thing—I don't want to change her."

"Then you mustn't rebel against the Sunday-school atmosphere, which you find so depressing. You mustn't object to being ruled by your wife, who is in her turn ruled by the priests. So far she has scored a success, and has kept completely away from us. She is probably obeying her confessor in this, and

so she disregards your wishes with an easy conscience. And now we have Delfini butting in! To me, it is almost comical. Mark, believe me, the only perfectly happy man is the perfectly free man. He is not afraid of any bogies waiting round the corner to come and carry him off and submit him to humiliating punishments. Fear is at the root of all religion. It is this cowardly fear of the unknown that binds men. Cut yourself free from it! Cast it away—conquer your nursery fears."

Adrian was standing up, and his immense and massive form was outlined against the space of light beyond the loggia. He was a powerful man physically, and his deep, booming voice carried a certain authority. Beside him Markham looked very young, slight, lissom, graceful.

"You were once a Catholic, Adrian," he said; "you knew perhaps more about the religion than I have ever known, because you were in a seminary. Doesn't the thought of it ever make you afraid? Don't you ever remember what the Church teaches about the apostate?"

"I have conquered all those ridiculous nursery fears," said Adrian; "I am a free man."

"You don't think, then," pursued Markham a little inexorably, "that when you come to die you may be haunted by those old fears?"

Adrian looked at him with hard, keen eyes. It was unlike Markham to talk like this and remind him of disagreeable things that belonged to teachings he had long since abandoned.

"I shall have the weakness of a sick man, and it is possible that I may exhibit an abnormal folly for which, as a dying man, I shall not be accountable. But I don't think it probable, and Adelaide has promised to see that no priest is allowed to cross the threshold however much I may whine for one. As

I live I intend to die!" His voice rang out with a clear, relentless force; it seemed almost as if he were challenging heaven and hell to do their worst.

Markham gave an involuntary shudder, of which he felt a little ashamed. He hoped that Adrian had not noticed it.

"I don't think I'm the kind of man to go to such an extreme as that," he said, after a moment's pause.

And suddenly the thought of Rina came back to his mind, and the memory of the beautiful hours they had spent together in dim old churches since their marriage, kneeling and praying side by side, witnessing almost daily the Holy Sacrifice, returned to him with a sudden poignant freshness. He saw that Rina's influence had led him back almost imperceptibly to the devout practice of his religion. He had come again into the spiritual atmosphere that he had known before his father's death. And he had desired so to come. He had foreseen what his marriage with Rina would entail, and he had not wished it otherwise. He had wanted to make a fresh start. And now during the last few months he had known that his religion had renewed its old strong influence upon him, had developed a profundity which did not seem to have anything to do with Rina at all. Markham was not ignorant of the workings of supernatural grace in the soul, of which, as theology teaches, some of the surest channels are the holy sacraments of the Church. But his return to his old friendship had abruptly checked that spiritual development. He had broken his promise—though, as he still assured himself, only the letter of it—and the very fact that he had done so had hurt his conscience and made him neglectful. For many weeks past he had avoided going to Mass in the chapel of the old palace and only Rina guessed the reason of his non-appearance.

Adrian as yet knew nothing of that promise which Markham had made before his marriage, or he would have realized his own success more clearly. He looked at Markham scathingly.

"Last year you were that kind of man. Unfortunately you fell in love with the sort of woman who could be of no use to you at all. But I haven't given up hope of you, Mark. You're letting yourself be governed just now after the manner of many young, adoring husbands. But the fact of your coming here—against her wishes, I am sure, and now also with her knowledge—shows that you are not quite lost to the 'van and the freemen'."

Markham resented this hotly.

"I wish you would give up trying to turn me," he said roughly; "I come to see you now as a friend—for the sake of old days. I'm not a disciple any more."

He was stung by Adrian's scorn.

"Oh, you need not explain," said Guise. "Even Adelaide has noticed how you have changed to us. You never seem quite at your ease. You're awkward and embarrassed with us, and half the time you look as if you were wishing yourself somewhere else. It isn't very flattering, and, joking apart, we used to think your friendship would prove a slightly more enduring thing."

Adrian's tone, suddenly personal with the privilege of past intimacy, cut Markham like a knife. It made him feel that he had shown ingratitude for all those past very real kindnesses which Guise and his wife had offered, and which he had only too readily accepted. And he could not deny that charge of awkwardness and embarrassment, though it was dreadful to think Adelaide had noticed it too. It was perfectly true that he had frequently felt it when approaching both Guise and his wife. The

figure of Rina seemed to stand between himself and them. And in his pitiable attempt to compromise he had been loyal neither to wife nor friend. It was folly to expect to have a thing both ways, to try to steer a middle course; one was only wounded on both sides.

"We have sometimes wondered why you came," said Adrian.

"Perhaps my friendship for you both was stronger than you supposed," said Markham bitterly.

Adrian lifted his eyebrows incredulously and made no reply. Markham rose and moved idly out on to the terrace and looked at the lovely panorama that was outspread before his eyes.

Across the vineyards and olive-groves that seemed to dip from terrace to terrace upon the sloping hills he looked down upon Val d'Arno cut by the gleaming curve of the river. Against the western sky he could see the sharp peaks of the Carrara mountains snow-covered and outlined with a magic clearness. Cypresses stood up like black flames. Patches of daffodils were blooming in the garden, and clumps of purple iris. Little hedges of pink monthly roses were already blossoming bravely. Far off the Tuscan hills, warm with the bloom of spring, lying below the crest of Vallombrosa, were dotted with pearl-white villages set in cozy nests of trees. The city lying in its cup was faintly illuminated now with the fragile gold of the March sunlight; it looked almost like one of those mirage cities that lure the traveler in the Sahara onward with the promise of water. Only the red dome showed some signs of substantiality amid all that frail and elusive loveliness.

As he stood there, his mind half occupied with the view and half with Adrian's words, he saw a small

figure approaching. It was that of a little girl picturesquely but shabbily dressed, carrying a book under her arm.

"May I see the Signora?" she said to Markham in rapid Italian.

But Adrian, hearing her voice, strode out of the loggia.

"Run away, Carla," he said; "the Signora is too ill to teach you anything to-day. Come back to-morrow and perhaps she will be better."

The child looked disappointed, and moved reluctantly away. Adrian took one of the rolls from the table and, spreading it quickly with butter, he handed it to the child.

She departed and Markham looked questioningly at Adrian.

"One of Adelaide's little protegées," he said. "She's so devoted to children, and these Tuscan children with their pretty ways and manners delight her. Carla is an orphan and is staying with some very poor *Contadini* here. They want to put her into a home—with nuns, if you please! They appealed to Adelaide to assist them in the process. But she's made up her mind to adopt the child, and save her from such a fate. I don't think it's a bad scheme, do you?"

Markham was a little taken aback, and he found no words with which to reply. It was so clear that the little thing would be brought up without any religion at all, and would be perhaps forever deprived of her Catholic birthright. A feeling of indignation arose in his heart.

"I think it's a mistake myself to adopt children of another nationality," he said carelessly.

"Adelaide must do as she likes. If she wants the child, she shall have it. Her relations here are only too glad to be relieved of the burden."

Markham's eyes were fixed rather wistfully upon the small, retreating figure.

"It would be interesting to watch the development of such a child, would it not?" said Adrian.

Markham's throat was very dry.

"I think it would be a great mistake," he repeated obstinately.

He took his sketching things and strolled into the *podere*. But he did not feel much inclined to work this morning; the conversation with Adrian had been exhausting. And all the morning he was haunted by that little flushed, fair face with its golden hair and blue eyes—the face of the child whom Adelaide wished to adopt. His whole soul revolted against the thought; he wondered what he could do to prevent it.

CHAPTER XXV

TOWARD the end of April an unusual spell of heat descended upon Florence, and a slight change for the worse became manifest in the old prince's condition.

Markham had been to Fiesole much less often during the past few weeks. Without definitely admitting the fact to himself he had been offended with Adrian's words when he had accused him of having changed toward them. He disliked being taken to task, and he resolved that for the present he would keep away. Then there had been the disagreeable episode of little Carla, and he felt that if Adelaide ever spoke to him on the subject he would be compelled to reveal his real opinion.

But the sudden heat in Florence drove him into the country, and though at first he made expeditions

to other places, he found it simpler and easier to spend the days with Adrian at Fiesole. It saved trouble to go there, and the place was enchanting; he always found fresh subjects for his brush. The old, creamy walls of the little villa dripped with roses, crimson and golden and pink. Over the pillared loggia the wistaria's misty mauve garlands wove softest arabesques. It all left an impression upon his mind of fragrance and delicious tempered sunshine, of gray olive woods touched of silver by sun and wind, of blossoming gardens hung with the lovely vine-garlands and festooned with Banksian roses, the massed groups of cypress-trees lending shadow and density to the scene.

Adrian's book was making good progress, so he said, and Adelaide found occupation in typing it, and in her spare time she amused and instructed little Carla, who now nearly always formed one of the party.

Markham noticed that the child's rather shabby raiment had been discarded, and now she was always prettily though simply dressed in white frocks. She had not yet come to live with the Guises; she went home every evening, but she spent most of her days with them. Adelaide was afraid as yet to undertake the entire charge of her; she thought she might disturb Adrian in his work. When they returned to England they would take her with them, and then she could engage a nurse to look after the child.

They did not speak much of these plans to Markham; they had a suspicion that he was not altogether in sympathy with them.

Markham had stayed rather late one evening, but he did not always dine at the palace now. He made the excuse of lingering in the country as late as he could, and Helen accepted it without any idea of the

real truth. Only Rina guessed, but she said nothing. She was very much occupied in the sick-room, and Markham saw little of her. She seemed to be aware by some process of telepathy when he had been with the Guises, and it made a barrier between them.

The sun had set, and the glory of the western sky was rapidly fading, but the pink afterglow washed the olives till they seemed to be bathed in a rosy foam. The garden was filled with the faint almond scent of the wistaria. In the grove of ilex-trees a nightingale was singing. The roses were already blossoming in great profusion, though it would be some weeks before they attained to their full glory. Little Carla was lying half asleep on Adelaide's knee. The busy scratching of Adrian's pen could be heard from the room within. Markham was just packing up his paint-box and block when the telephone bell rang sharply. They heard Adrian go across the room to answer it.

"If it's Mrs. Emminson tell her she must be sure to come up to dine to-morrow," said Adelaide.

Adrian came out quickly.

"It isn't Mrs. Emminson," he said; "it's a message for you, Mark. You had better answer it."

Markham took up the receiver, and to his astonishment he heard Rina's voice.

"Is that you, Markham?"

"Yes. What is it? Has anything happened?"

There was a pause, then the two people in the loggia heard Markham say:

"I'll come home at once. I'm most awfully sorry. I'll be down in half an hour."

He hung up the receiver and came out into the loggia.

"What is it, Mark? Not bad news, I hope?" said Adrian.

"Yes. The old prince is dead," said Markham. His face was white.

He gathered up his things and said good-by hastily. Adrian walked down to the gate with him.

"Mind you, come whenever you like. Whenever you can get away. I'm afraid you won't be able to escape the funeral—that'll be rather a trial for you."

"I don't think I wish to escape it."

"That's just as you please. You're sure of your welcome here in any case. This may mean a lot of difference to you, Mark."

"Yes, of course it may," said Markham. He spoke almost absent-mindedly and was glad when Adrian left him at the gate; he had been half afraid he might accompany him, as he often did, to the place where the tram stopped.

His thoughts were full of Rina. How had she known with such certainty where he was? All these days she must have known he was visiting the Guises daily, yet she had said nothing; she had borne his neglect, his indifference, with a silent patience he could not but admire. And the old prince—he wondered how he had died, if he had recognized any one, whether there had been at the last some fugitive sign of returning sense? There was always something tragic and mysterious in death. The old man had been ill nearly three months, and no one had imagined the end to be so near. It was for him a merciful release. And it would set Rina free. They could return to Stones. They could begin their life there, the life they had often talked about in the early days of their marriage. And Helen? What would become of Helen, who had spent the best years of her life in unselfishly tending her father-in-law? Markham seemed to remember having heard that in default of male heirs the palace would go to a

great nephew of the prince, a young man who had married a rich American wife, and who had a couple of young sons. In any case, the death would make a great difference to the Marchesa San Raimondo. She might indeed still occupy a small apartment in the palace, there was space and to spare; but he felt that she would not care to do this, and she might, of course, prefer to return to England after her long exile.

Somehow he could not picture his mother-in-law in England. He could not picture her away from the palace where she had spent so many years. Where Rina had been born.

When he reached the palace, hurrying through the evening crowds that throng the streets of all Italian cities, he went straight up to Rina's room. He found her alone; she was lying on the sofa with her rosary in her hands. She was very pale, and he saw that she had been crying.

Markham went up to her and kissed her.

"Darling, I'm so sorry," he said gently. "And I'm so sorry that I wasn't here—that I wasn't with you."

"It was very sudden," she said; "there was no time to send for you."

"How did you know where I was? You telephoned——"

"I did not know. But I thought it was where you were most likely to be."

There was something that sounded hopeless in her voice, as if she were past caring very much where or with whom he spent his time.

"I am sorry," said Markham again. "I don't think I'll ever go there again. But I'm more than ever sorry I was there to-day, when you wanted me."

He sat by her side, kissing her, stroking her hair, murmuring words of love, of consolation.

At last she rose.

"Would you like to come downstairs with me?" she said.

Markham concealed his reluctance.

"Of course I will come," he said.

The great bedroom had been converted into a *chapelle ardente.* Windows, shutters, and persiennes were all closed. It was hot and airless, and the flames of the immense wax candles that stood at intervals around the bed seemed to add to the heat. There was a faint, rather sickly scent of flowers. And on the great bed with its heavy, dark damask hangings, lay the dead man. His finely chiseled face was shrunken and spiritualized by death, and seemed almost the face of a young man, clear-cut, handsome. The thick, white hair was brushed off the brow, exposing its fine modeling. He looked as one asleep, but in a sleep purged of all earthly dreaming. Markham noticed his hands, long, white, rather wasted, clasped upon his breast, a rosary twisted between the stiffened fingers. There was a crucifix upon his breast. Death had intensified and almost exaggerated the look of race, which to Markham had always been such an attraction. Little as he had known him, he had been able to appreciate the force of that giant personality. It had helped him to understand Rina, her education, her upbringing. Strict and hard, and even tyrannical, as that rule of his had been, it had made her the woman she was, had bestowed upon her, as it were, a touch of that same austere force, that same power. This quality had attracted him in the first days of their engagement; he had felt its influence upon his own life. He had recognized it as something infinitely worth having. He held Rina's hand in his now, as they knelt down by the bedside together to pray.

The candles flickered on the dead man's face, and

the changing lights and shadows thus produced gave to Markham the almost eerie impression that he saw the features moving, as if a tremor had passed over them. There were some nuns kneeling on the other side of the great bed, and at a little distance on a prie-dieu he caught a glimpse of the bowed, veiled head of the Marchesa San Raimondo. From time to time, people he did not know and had never seen before came soft-footed into the room—came to pray, to make with holy water the sign of the cross on the dead man's forehead and breast, and then to slip quietly away.

This man had made a good death. The day before he was stricken by the blow that had deprived him of sense and speech, he had made his confession, according to his weekly habit. All his life he had been punctual and regular in the devout practice of his religion. And now judgment had been passed upon him—the eternal judgment. And *after death, the judgment.* As he remembered those fateful words now, Markham shivered.

These were what Adrian had called the "nursery bogies"—judgment, the fear of hell. *And after death, the judgment.* The words repeated themselves over and over again in his head, with all their terrible possibilities, the significance which no Catholic can ever venture to palliate. The mercy, the tenderness, the long-suffering of Christ; aye, even the work of the Redemption itself, had not yet prevented Him from uttering such warnings that made any palliation impossible. It was in His mercy that He had, so to speak, lifted a little corner of the veil that shrouded the Afterward from the eyes of men. As Markham considered these things in a meditation that was perhaps imposed upon his mind by the sight of that stark, white figure on the bed, his thoughts turned almost insensibly to Adrian, his

words, his teaching. And he knew that while he had listened to him time after time, he had felt faint stirrings of disloyalty toward Rina, because of what he called her bigotry, her intolerance. He had resented the thought that he was allowing himself to be ruled by her in matters of faith. But now the pendulum had swung back a little. In the presence of death it is almost impossible for a man to keep his mind quite free from the teachings of revealed religion. For a Catholic taught to pray and meditate from his earliest years such thoughts must inevitably be of a personal nature. The positive certainty of death obtrudes with a persistence that can not be denied, and imposes the contemplation of that hereafter that is as inevitable as death itself. To-morrow it might be his turn to be swept off the earth as dust before a storm. Or Rina's—Rina—there might be in the future occasions of grave physical peril for Rina. He hoped they would not come yet, and now he almost found himself wishing that they might never come. He felt that he could not bear it—the suspense of those long months of looking forward, the final cruel crisis. He came a little closer to Rina, and his shoulder touched hers as if with an instinctive desire to protect her. He felt that she leaned against him, glad of the support he offered. She was looking very pale, very tired, there was a fragile look about her. She had suffered perhaps all those hours he had been absent. And of late he had so constantly left her alone. He no longer went to Mass with her in the morning; he had ceased to go to confession, and he had wondered if she had guessed it. At Easter she must have known that he had not fulfilled his duties. In the intimacy, at once beautiful and terrible, of their life it was practically impossible for one of them to have that kind of secret from the other. It is true

that he had left Florence for some days during Easter week, so that Rina could not know for certain. Adrian's influence had been strong just then, and he had carried him off to Viareggio. But Rina must have guessed, and if so, the knowledge had inevitably hurt her. Once or twice he had resolved to give up going to see Adrian, but always there had been some little excuse which prevented him from immediately carrying out his intention. Adelaide was ill—it would be selfish to abandon Adrian at such a juncture; then to spend the hot enervating days out of Florence in the delicious hill air, so fresh and invigorating, became for him almost a physical necessity. The beauty of it all attracted him, laying a firm hold upon his imagination. And he had liked, too, to show Adrian that he had not really changed or forgotten him. He was getting over that awkwardness, that slight embarrassment which he had felt and shown at first, and which had come under the lash of Adrian's tongue. Yes, that was the worst of Adrian. He treated him still as if he were an immature boy, instead of a responsible married man. He would reprove him if he felt like it without mercy or apology. The knowledge rankled. Although Adrian was so much older than himself he stood in the eyes of Markham's world as a man of evil repute—in a word, as an apostate. Markham always had the feeling that he had stooped a little to possess this friendship, for which his mother and all her immediate *ambiente* frankly blamed him. He had given up things for Adrian, and he felt that if he deserved kindness and consideration from any one, it was from this man, whose society he had sought in the face of censure. He had stuck to him against all the world, and for several years. But because of that slipping away at the time of his marriage—a period when a man

may be considered as normally too much occupied with other interests for intimate friendships outside —Adrian had not hesitated to haul him over the coals. It had made Markham feel a very small person indeed, and for the moment he almost hated Adrian, in spite of the curious fascination that the older man exercised over him.

It comforted him now to feel Rina's slight form leaning against him; it soothed him, made him feel as if they had suddenly become less far apart.

Markham was strangely subdued all that evening. He sat for the most part alone in the *salotto*, which belonged to him and Rina. Rina was with her mother, and he did not like to impose his presence upon them. Although he was genuinely shocked and distressed and did in a measure share their grief, he felt that he dared not intrude upon Helen's deep sorrow. Rina remained with her, consoling her, cherishing her.

But he felt a little lonely, and then he told himself that he deserved to be lonely. He had systematically neglected his wife all through the beautiful spring weeks. He had left her alone in the sad gloom of the old palace; had never once suggested that she should spend the day in the country with him. He was never at hand to go out with her when she had a little leisure. He had put her completely on one side for Adrian. His purposes of amendment had become mere velleities for the occasional salving of conscience. He had purposely avoided envisaging the rift that had widened between himself and Rina. It was a spiritual gulf that was threatening to destroy the very foundations of their life together. She had ceased to remonstrate, even to entreat. She had left him quite free —and how desolate she must have felt when she saw the use to which he put that freedom! Perhaps she

was beginning to care less for him, to feel more resigned.

The thought made him feel restless and ill at ease.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE old prince's will was to most people a complete surprise. In it he had left a substantial sum to Helen, as well as the villa at Settignano, which he had bought for this purpose in recent years. By dint of economy he had been able to set aside a certain amount every year, and this, together with other money he had at his disposal, would make a handsome provision for her. He judged that she would not be likely to settle permanently in England after her long exile in a more sunny climate, and so the idea had occurred to him to buy this home for her just outside Florence, and in her beloved Tuscany. He had indeed done more for her than any one had expected.

Helen was secretly astonished at the comparative opulence that was to be hers. She had not expected it in the least, for it had been the old man's habit to speak always as if she and Rina would be almost paupers after his death. It was partly for that reason that Helen had been anxious her daughter should marry.

Helen had been too busy during those months of her father-in-law's illness to give any attentive thought to Rina. It was indeed only after the funeral had taken place and she was beginning to consider seriously her own plans for the immediate future that she suddenly became aware of a change in her daughter. It struck her for the first time that Rina had lost much of her radiance. It is true that she had been very assiduous in her attendance

upon the old man, and perhaps the long illness had been a strain upon her nerves; but she was certainly looking pale and drawn.

Perhaps she would never have ascertained the exact truth, had it not been for a visit she received from Conte Delfini. As an old friend of the family, he had come to see her in the early days of her mourning, for the purpose of paying a formal visit of condolence upon her. Having expressed his sympathy in her loss, he inquired about her plans for the future.

"I suppose I shall settle down at Settignano," she said. "I hope I shall like living in the country. But we are going to England very soon, I think, and I shall probably stay there all the summer."

"Donna Rina will go with you?" he asked.

"I don't know yet if they will go with me. But, of course, they will be going home very soon—almost at once. They may even start before I do. Their home at Stones is waiting for them—they have only delayed going there in order to be with me."

She was a little astonished at his close questioning. Why was he so anxious to know Rina's plans?

"I am glad of that," said Conte Delfini. "I saw Donna Rina at the funeral, and it struck me that she was looking ill, and perhaps needed a change."

"Yes, I am afraid it has been a trying time for Rina. But she was a great help to me; I don't know what I should have done without her. A change will be good for her, as you say, and there is no object in their remaining in Florence now."

Something in his tone had made her feel slightly uncomfortable, and increased that anxiety which she had lately felt about her daughter. But Rina had never complained, and she had always brushed aside any mention of her health.

"It will be wise to get young Mr. Proctor away from Florence," said Toni suddenly. He spoke with an evident effort and fixed his dark, lusterless eyes upon her with an expression almost of entreaty.

"Wise?" repeated Helen.

"Dear Marchesa," said Toni, "please do not think me an evil-speaking gossip. But here where your daughter is so well-known and so much beloved—it is impossible to prevent people from talking—and from censuring."

"I do not understand," said Helen loftily. "Who has been censuring whom?"

"It is very difficult for me to tell you. But the fact is certain that Mr. Proctor's friends here are people that your world and mine could not help condemning. He is always with them. That he neglects his wife I can not believe, but his actions—his intimacy with such people—must be very painful to her—must cause her great anxiety."

"I don't know in the least what you are talking about," said Helen. "I was not even aware that Markham had made any friends here outside the people we know. He is away a good deal painting, but that is his profession, and Rina would be the last to feel hurt that he should have and follow his occupation. If people are saying cruel things about him and my daughter, you may deny it, and tell them that it is absolutely false and without any foundation."

Delfini now perceived that Helen was in complete ignorance of the truth, and he could not help feeling a warm admiration for Rina's courage and loyalty in concealing it from her.

Was it, therefore, wise of him to speak? But it was too late to go back now, and Helen was indignantly awaiting his explanation.

Her haughty manner increased his timidity, and

it required a supreme effort to enable him to continue.

"You are not aware, then, that he spends nearly all his time with a Mr. Adrian Guise and his wife, who have been living at Fiesole all the winter?" he said.

"Adrian Guise?" repeated Helen in an incredulous tone.

"Mr. Guise is an apostate," said Delfini. "He writes novels and other books against the Church."

Helen's heart sank. It was the first intimation she had received of Adrian's presence in Florence, and the effect it produced upon her was a stab of sharp pain that Rina had kept this knowledge from her. And yet—and yet—as she considered it, she saw there were many sufficient reasons why a loyal and loving wife, such as she knew her daughter to be, should have hesitated to make known the perfidy of her husband. Pride, loyalty, and love must all alike have urged her to keep silence. But if Markham had indeed broken his word, as Toni seemed to suggest, Rina must have been passing through a period of very bitter suffering and disillusionment.

Helen said slowly:

"I can only hope you are mistaken. I have never heard of the Guises being in Florence."

"My sister has met them," said Delfini; "I regret that Maria should visit such people, and I have tried to stop her. She saw Mr. Proctor there, so that there can have been no possible mistake."

"We knew of this friendship before his marriage," said Helen; "it was one of the conditions upon which we allowed the marriage to take place—that Markham should cut himself off completely from an intimacy so dangerous to his faith. Until he had promised to do this, we did not permit the engagement. Rina saw the necessity too—she was

perfectly reasonable—she was determined to abide by our decision, although her happiness was involved."

"I spoke once to your daughter about it," continued Toni; "she was very much distressed. I am afraid I was the first to tell her where he actually spent his days. That was some little time ago, and I have not since seen her to speak to. But she suggested to me that the Guises were not ready to accept their dismissal—that they had purposely followed Mr. Proctor to Italy. There was a meeting first, I think, at Sorrento, and then they came to Fiesole. No doubt, it was for the purpose of renewing their old influence over him, which seems to have been very great."

"Yes; it was very great. It was making his mother quite miserable, and it made her all the more anxious that he should marry Rina."

Delfini thought indignantly that Rina had been sacrificed, and that the sacrifice had proved perfectly futile. If it had been a last effort to save Markham from this undesirable intimacy, they might at least have tried to make him marry a woman with some knowledge and experience of the world.

"Rina has never said a single word to me about it," said Helen after a little pause. "It seems to me that all Florence knows my child's concerns before I do."

She spoke with bitterness.

"She may have preferred not to add to your anxiety at such a time," said Delfini. "But you will understand now why, as a friend of yours and of hers, I do entreat you to persuade Mr. Proctor to accompany you to England."

"Of course, he will go if Rina goes," said Helen, "and, as I have told you, there is nothing to detain her in Florence now."

Toni made no comment. But there was a look of incredulity in his grave face that she could not help perceiving.

"Of course he will," she repeated with an emphasis that was almost violent.

"God grant you may be right," said Toni; "I think myself that it will be more difficult to induce him to leave than you suppose." He rose, fearing that he had said too much; but he felt the necessity of impressing upon Helen the imperative need for drastic action of some kind. It was for Rina's sake that he was doing it, he told himself, for the happiness of her whole life seemed to be at stake.

"Marchesa," he said, "I beg your forgiveness. I did not, of course, imagine that you were in such complete ignorance. But you will perhaps forgive me when I tell you that for the sake of the past, your daughter's happiness can never be a matter of complete indifference to me."

He raised his hand to her lips and then hurried away, almost as if he preferred that she should not make any reply to that hurried admission which nothing but the sharpness of his anxiety could have wrung from his deep reserve.

Helen sat down after he had gone, very quietly considering the situation as it had just been presented to her. She prayed, and as she prayed, the tears came into her eyes, burning and searing them. She had never shed such tears as those for Rina before. It seemed to her as if the curtain had been abruptly raised, and she had been called upon without warning to witness the tragedy of her daughter's life—one of those profound spiritual tragedies that hurt the soul rather than the body.

So the Guises were at Fiesole, and Markham had gone back to them. He had not been strong enough to resist the temptation when it offered itself. The

claims of that old intimate friendship had proved too strong, and he had succumbed to their powerful grasp. The long illness and then the death of the old prince had given him rich possibilities of escape from the palace. He had had countless legitimate excuses for leaving his wife day after day to her duties as a daughter and granddaughter. So natural did it seem that Helen had hardly missed him, nor had she been aware of any constraint between the young couple. Except at meals she had had indeed little opportunity of observing them together. There had been nothing unusual to attract her attention.

But Helen saw beyond the merely temporal results of Markham's action. She saw with deadly clearness that the experiment had failed. Rina had not been strong enough to separate him from the old friendship, to keep him from the temptation that had so soon and so tragically presented itself. All their prayers for him had not sufficed. All her love had not been strong enough—nor had his love for her. They had been married rather more than eight months. Was the marriage already a failure? She reproached herself bitterly for ever having permitted it, for allowing Rina to run so great and grave a risk. At this critical moment she sadly missed the guidance of the old prince. She had always turned to him in all difficulties. If he had been tyrannical and overbearing he was yet always kind to her; she had found him sympathetic and wise when she had appealed to him for advice. And he had loved Rina, had felt almost a father's pride in her. Now she found herself compelled for perhaps the first time in her life to act on her own initiative in circumstances of great difficulty. It would be so fatally easy to make a false step that would increase the gravity of the situation.

She rang a little bell and a servant immediately appeared.

"Is Mr. Proctor in?" she asked.

"I do not know, *Eccellenza.*"

"Please go and see. If he is in I should be glad if he would come down and see me."

"Very well, *Eccellenza.*"

In a few minutes the man returned.

"Mr. Proctor is not at home, *Eccellenza.* He left word that he would not be in until dinner-time."

Helen sat there for a little longer and then she rose and put a black lace veil upon her head. She descended the stairs, passed through the great suite of now deserted rooms that for so long had been occupied by her father-in-law and at last came to the passage that led to the chapel. She paused for a moment before the door, then she quietly turned the handle and entered.

It was growing dark within, for the windows were all of stained glass and there was no other light except that furnished by the lamp before the tabernacle. But as Helen entered she saw that she was not alone. Rina was kneeling at the back, almost hidden by the deep shadows. Her black dress and veil seemed to mingle obscurely with the surrounding gloom. She was so still that she might have been a somber statue carved in that attitude which suggested at once devotion and grief.

She was still there when Helen, having finished the recitation of her rosary, rose to leave the chapel. Now that she was definitely aware of her daughter's unhappiness it made her all the more anxious to remove her from the scene of it as quickly as possible.

"But of course she can't leave Markham," thought Helen. "And if he refuses to leave Florence she must remain here."

She remembered then the look of incredulity in Toni's face when she had asserted her belief that the young couple would leave for England quite soon.

Rina raised her head and smiled at her mother as she passed. But she still remained there in that devout kneeling attitude. There was something very calm about her expression and Helen felt a momentary sense of relief. Perhaps Toni had after all exaggerated . . .

She found it difficult to broach the subject to Rina. The fact of her reticence showed a reluctance to discuss it even with her mother. Helen, who had never been able to speak of her own sorrows, respected a similar inability in another person.

Some people undoubtedly derive substantial comfort from the recitation and sympathetic discussion of their woes, but it had not been so with her and she rightly judged that it would not be so with Rina, who possessed so many of her own qualities, modernized and as it were brought up to date. It would perhaps only increase her pain to be forced to speak. As it was she was able to put a brave face upon it, and there was nothing in her bright, affectionate manner to Markham that night at dinner to show that she had any secret cause for complaint. She was determined to hide as long as possible the anxiety that was torturing her. It was not for Helen to force her confidence.

Besides, when all was said and done Rina was Markham's wife. She had made this choice despite much excellent advice to the contrary. And she had certainly loved him very deeply. Perhaps she loved him still but with the different love of the woman who has suffered a very swift disillusionment. Markham had betrayed his solemn promise to her, and Helen knew that could not but have had a

marked effect upon Rina, who was the soul of honor. It must at least have smudged the idol, even if the stains were not destined to be permanent ones. It must have revealed the indubitable presence of dross in the gold. Perhaps few people pass through life without revelations of this kind, but when they come suddenly and violently and in the first freshness of life and love they can be productive of great bitterness and sorrow.

Helen looked at Markham that evening as it were with new eyes. He was subdued, as befitted the inmate of a house of such recent mourning, but he talked a great deal with his accustomed charm; he was very attentive to Rina; there was nothing in his manner to his wife to suggest any alteration in his feeling toward her. But she seemed to see for the first time a weakness in his face that she had always dreaded to discover. He was not bad, he was not dishonorable, but he was weak and yielded himself easily to stronger influences. She believed that he had made that promise with a very firm purpose of fulfilling it. She believed still what he had told her before his marriage, that he desired to end that friendship which he knew to be dangerous. She was sorry for him now as a mother might feel sorry for her son who had not been strong enough to keep his word.

Only he must not hurt Rina—he must not be allowed to destroy her happiness. She felt that that was something she could never forgive. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

IT WAS on the following Sunday that Rina, returning from Mass rather later than usual, discovered Markham finishing his coffee in the *salotto*.

She had had a bad sleepless night and had been unable to get up in time for the early Mass in the chapel, so she had gone later to the church of the Trinità.

Judging by his rather perfunctory greeting, Markham seemed in a hurry to finish his meal, and not altogether pleased that she should have come in just then. There was a bright defiance in his blue eyes as if he almost challenged her to question him.

Rina, however, said nothing but sitting down at the table began to pour out some coffee.

"That's getting cold," said Markham, "I'll ring for some more."

He rang the bell. Then he hastily swallowed the contents of his cup.

"I must be off," he said glancing at the clock.

"Are you going to Mass now, Markham?" she said simply.

"No—I shan't have time. I'm going to catch the tram." He paused as if waiting for her to speak but as she said nothing he continued: "Adrian's telephoned to say he's got a bad wrist—he wants me to go there as soon as I can."

"Couldn't you find time to go to Mass first?" she asked.

Negligent as he had been he had not as yet to her knowledge omitted to hear Mass on Sundays.

"No—it'll make me too late." He took up his hat and stick. "Good-by," he said.

"Good-by," said Rina.

She watched him as he went out of the room. The hot coffee was brought in and she drank some of it thirstily, but she left the roll untasted on her plate. The manner of his going had given her a little shock. That careless defiance of his—the utter absence of any leave-taking except that hasty good-by flung at her—his evident irritation at her words.

But all secrecy had gone from the adventure. He was able to tell her plainly that his destination was Fiesole. There was no attempt to conceal anything, but rather an instinct to flaunt and display his easy emergence from all restraining bonds. Three weeks had passed since the old prince's death, and for about a fortnight of that time Markham had remained near her, helping her and Helen, comforting and sustaining his wife with something of his old devotion. At the funeral, too, he had been one of the most conspicuous figures, and Rina had felt a strange pride in him, in his grave deportment, his dignified self-possession. For a little while she felt that Markham the lover had returned. She had hoped if she had not believed in the permanence of the change. She did her part, she welcomed him back, on her side there were no reproaches, no allusions; she was gentle and tactful with him. They had drawn nearer to each other again. It had been a time of relief for Rina. Then, as she well knew, the opposition had resumed its work. Letter after letter, message after message, had come for Markham. He would have been more than human if he could have resisted them all—that was her way of excusing the lapse that so quickly supervened. Now for several days his visits had been resumed—he had gone off early and returned late. To Helen the plea of work was still made, but to Rina no excuses were offered. And as if in order to avert any reproaches he had assumed a cold, stern manner toward her as if to awe her into silence respecting his doings.

When Helen came into the room a few minutes later she found Rina in tears, her unfinished breakfast on her plate.

"Why, Rina, darling, what's the matter?" she said anxiously.

"Nothing," said Rina. "At least nothing that I can tell you." Her eyes were fixed upon her mother and conveyed an inarticulate appeal for silence.

But Helen felt that the moment had come when she might speak. Gathering her courage together she said: "Is it about Markham? Has he gone to Fiesole?"

At least she could show Rina that she was not in ignorance of the fact. It would make the confession less difficult for her.

A look of relief came into Rina's face.

"Yes," she said. "You knew, then?"

"I know very little beyond that he does go there. It is only quite recently that I've known anything at all about it." Helen paused. "I—I have wanted to speak to you about it, Rina."

"I hoped you hadn't heard," said Rina. "One can do nothing. He has gone there now—he wouldn't even wait to hear Mass first."

Her abrupt sentences were punctuated by little sobs. She was forcing back her tears.

"We must try to get him to leave Florence—to go back to England. I shall be going myself soon. I hope you will both come with me," said Helen.

"Of course I shall come," said Rina. "Markharm—Markham must do as he thinks best." There was for the first time a little bitterness in her tone.

"Oh, he is sure to come. He wouldn't let you go alone with me," said Helen.

Rina raised her eyes and looked despairingly at her mother.

"If he comes it will be unwillingly. I shall never get him back now. Once or twice I've made so sure that he really meant to give them up. But they won't let him go."

There was a dull finality of hopelessness in her tone.

"We must pray for him," said Helen gently.

"Don't you think I have prayed—all these weeks —all these months?"

"Yes, I am sure you have," said Helen.

Rina rose suddenly and flung her arms around her mother as sometimes—not very often—she had done when she was a little girl.

"Let's go to England. Let's go soon! I feel as if I couldn't bear it here any more."

She was crying now in a wild, unchecked way as if at last her long self-control had broken down completely.

"Hush, darling, don't cry so. You'll make yourself ill." Helen's arms were clasping her. She pressed Rina's face to hers. "Yes—we'll go as soon as you like. As soon as we can get ready."

This assurance seemed to soothe Rina, who dried her tears. When she was a little more composed she said:

"Don't say anything to Markham, please. He's not in a mood to listen. It's better not to interfere with him."

That hard defiance of his was a new weapon; she had felt the sharp touch of it and dreaded a repetition of the pain.

"I think I shall ask him if he will come with us," said Helen.

"Yes, but please don't say anything about the Guises. I mean—it might make him angry."

In spite of the shame of the exposure she began to be thankful that her mother had learned independently of her what was passing. She had dreaded being driven at last to enlighten her; it was a task from which she shrank. It occurred to her now to inquire how Helen knew.

"Toni Delfini told me the day he came to call,"

said the Marchesa. "He said he had spoken to you."

"Yes; I met him when I was out one evening. He was dreadfully distressed—he cares still what happens to me. Mother, isn't it terrible that people should be able to gossip about me and Markham—should even think we're not happy together?" Her tears began to flow afresh.

Helen laid her hand on her shoulder.

"Darling, it will be all right when we can get him away from here—away from these people."

"If we ever can," said Rina. "They won't let him go."

She looked enviously at her mother. After all she had had a few perfect years of happiness. There had been no cloud until death had stepped in to separate her from her beloved.

When Markham reached Fiesole that morning he found the place enveloped in a thick white curtain of fog. Everything dripped, and the trees showered drops upon him as he left the avenue and climbed through the *podére* up to the front of the house. The olive-trees were in flower now he noticed as he passed, and the little clusters of small yellow blossoms gave forth an odor of sharp sweetness. But the scene wanted sun, he told himself. Down in Florence it had been perfectly clear, and he had left the old city sitting bathed in the sunshine of an early June morning. Now nothing could be seen of her graceful towers, her red dome, her clustered roofs and shining river. All the mountains, too, were blotted out.

The fog chilled and depressed Markham. Today there was no Adrian sitting at work in the loggia. But the window was open and he entered the study. A servant appeared and asked him if he

had breakfasted and Markham replied in the affirmative.

The room was in a strange disorder. Books and papers were piled in careless heaps on the tables. The chairs stood about in confusion. He remembered that Adelaide had been suffering from a headache and probably from an administration of chloroform yesterday; she had not come downstairs and evidence of her absence was everywhere visible. Although it was June the room was deadly cold, as if the fog had crept into it and damped everything. Markham shivered, then he threw himself into a chair, lit a cigarette and waited for Adrian.

He waited a long time. Cold and nervous the delay made him uneasy, even apprehensive. He began to wonder why Guise had sent him such an urgent message at that early hour begging him to come up. Something in his voice, altered as it was by the telephone, seemed to convey the impression that he really did want Markham as soon as possible and for a particular reason. His wrist was bad, he said, but he had not mentioned that Adelaide was worse. And was she worse? Or had there been no real reason for Guise to insist thus upon his coming? Was it merely done to test him? He was angry with himself because he had fallen into the trap—if trap it was. He had hurried away and had rejected Rina's suggestion that he should hear Mass first. In his haste he had not even stopped to kiss Rina. He had believed that Adrian wanted him and he meant to show him by practical demonstration that his friendship was not the flimsy thing he had supposed. He had made a sacrifice for him to-day, and it was a sacrifice his conscience disapproved. He had not been very kind to Rina; he had answered her abruptly, even harshly. And now where was Adrian? Not at all in a hurry as it

seemed, for he had not as yet appeared. For half an hour and more Markham sat alone in the chilly room, looking out at the cold white curtain of fog that shut out the garden and the olive trees and the view from his sight.

He sincerely wished he had never come. He was more than ever certain that Adrian had done this to ascertain the power of his recovered ascendancy over him. Markham writhed at the thought. It was too late to retreat, for Adrian had been informed of his arrival. He wished he had listened to Rina's entreaty that he should go to Mass first.

Adrian called suddenly and cheerily in his deep bass voice over the stairs.

"Awfully sorry, my dear fellow. I'll be down in a few minutes. Did you ever see such a poisonous morning?" The familiar nonchalant manner stung him to renewed irritation.

Adrian should be more considerate; he should have had the sense to perceive that his coming out thus early on a Sunday morning had not been easy. To make a sacrifice and then to have it treated lightly and negligently is often bitter. Markham felt a growing anger. He was not sure that he would be able to be quite civil when Adrian appeared.

At last he came into the room, all fresh and bright from his hardy recent plunge into cold water with which he always vigorously commenced his day. He seemed to bring with him a large robust atmosphere. His big burly form, his beard, his bright eyes and thick grayish hair combined to make him resemble some of the more benevolent ogres of fairy-tale lore.

"Lord—what a mess! They might have made the room a bit shipshape, but I suppose they've been out to worship their gods as usual! Addie must really come down to look after things." He hauled

at the chairs with some violence for a few very active moments. "Faugh!—what a fog! Find the Sunny South if you can! Arno and Thames—they're all alike. And why are you so mute and mum to-day, my dear Mark? Did you get a dressing down before you came out? You must learn with philosophy the lesson that marriage has its pains as well as its pleasures."

"I thought you'd hurt your wrist," said Markham sullenly, with a glance at the broad brawny arms that had just lifted the chairs with such ease.

"So I had—at least I've got rheumatism in it, or writer's cramp or some fool thing that makes me unable to hold a pen for nuts. And Addie says she isn't fit to get up. We've been arguing the point for the last hour. I said that she ought to get up and she said that it would kill her if she did. I drew a tragic picture of this room. She said she didn't care. I left it at that. Never argue with your wife, Mark, it's waste of breath. But this is only to show you what made me late and so unable to greet your royal highness on the doorstep as befits your rank and importance."

When Adrian adopted this boisterous mood it was almost always done to conceal ill-humor. But Markham was not inclined to be tactful.

"Why on earth, then, did you make such a point of my coming so early?" he asked irritably.

The shadow of a frown crossed Adrian's forehead. He looked at Markham with one of his long, meditative, disdainful glances, as if he were examining an unusual and displeasing specimen.

"I am not at all in the mood to answer silly questions," he said. "If you thought it was too early why in the world did you come?"

"I came because I thought your wrist was really

bad," said Markham. "I thought perhaps I might help you."

Adrian did not answer for a moment; he was engaged in clearing away a siphon and a bottle of whisky and some glasses that stood on a small table. They were relics of the preceding night, and gave the untidy room an indescribable aspect of demoralization. He thrust the siphon and bottle into a cupboard and took the glasses out of the room.

When he came back his face was more amiable.

"Ah, that's very kind of you, my dear Mark," he said, "if you can relieve my fingers for an hour or two this morning I shall be most grateful. I'll dictate—if you don't really mind jotting down my trivial words. And presently I've got Carla's people coming up. They want references, if you please! You might say that you know all about us, a word from any one emanating from the Ubinaldi palace is sure to carry weight with the suspicious Tuscan mind."

"Do you mean that they object to your adopting Carla?" inquired Markham, feeling relief at the thought.

"Oh, no—they don't object. They only want to know a little more about us—to make sure, I suppose, that we shan't ill-treat her. You have only got to reassure them on that point and they will be quite satisfied."

Markham was silent. He was not at all prepared to assure these peasants that Adrian and his wife were ideal guardians for a little girl.

Fortunately Adrian was not looking at him just then; he was engaged in finding a block of large-sized paper which he extracted from a drawer. Then he made some rapid experiments with a fountain pen, and finally set these implements of the writer's craft on a small low table in front of Markham.

Then he glanced at the clock.

"We've a clear two hours before we need think of that absurd breakfast-lunch meal which obtains in this country—what the modern Oxonian calls *brunch,* I believe. I've forbidden Addie to want me for any mortal thing."

Markham was not in the least anxious or prepared to act as Adrian's amanuensis, but he was afraid to refuse the rôle thus thrust upon him. He had an idea that Adrian's garrulity was intended to stave off a refusal or at least an excuse. But he knew that Guise was in an irritable, dangerous mood when a spark might set fire to the flame of his ill-temper. In such moods he would say cruel wounding things to his wife or to any one else that happened to thwart him. Markham had begun to fear him, as he had never feared him in the old days when he had sat in admiration at his feet and meekly listened. Adrian was now ever on the alert to detect a lack of cordiality, of sympathy in him. Since the day when he had charged Markham with ingratitude there has been a want of smoothness in their relations and they constantly ruffled each other. When Adelaide was there things went better. Her light malice held them both in check; they were more on their guard.

Markham did not want to write, and he had a strong conviction that it was his duty to refuse. He wished that he had even now the moral courage to get up and go away. He felt that even if it precluded his return on another occasion that would not break his heart. The thought of the impending interview with Carla's guardians also affected him disagreeably and lent an additional force to his secret wish to escape.

Adrian made two or three strides up and down the room. Then he lit a cigarette, and meditatively

blew some wreaths of smoke into the air. There was something histrionic in his pose.

"Ready, Mark?"

"Yes," said Markham. He shifted his chair a little closer to the table.

"You know you're not exactly stimulating," Guise said with a touch of irritation.

"Who could be in this fog?" Markham answered resourcefully. "Go ahead, Adrian, I'm all ears and attention."

Adrian began slowly and hesitatingly. He was not accustomed to dictate, but Adelaide had urged him to acquire the habit since the rheumatic pains in his right hand were becoming more frequent. He uttered every syllable in a precise, ringing voice. But gradually his subject seemed to master him, to take possession of him. Words poured from his lips in swift and eloquent succession. His eyes flamed, little beads of perspiration stood on his brow, he waved his rheumatic right hand with a fine scorn of its supposed impotency. He looked like a prophet, Markham thought, when he found time amid that breathless escape of sentences, that torrent of words, to glance up at him. A prophet, a messenger of evil. . . .

Markham was so new to the task and so eager to appease Adrian by performing it creditably that he at first concentrated his mind upon getting the words down on to the paper as fast as he could. It was a task of some difficulty owing to the headlong speed at which Adrian spoke. He knew no shorthand and though he wrote very quickly and clearly it was as much as he could do to keep pace with him. He had not time at first to think about the meaning of the words, but wrote almost mechanically. It was only when Adrian paused from sheer lack of breath and perhaps a little exhausted

with his own eloquence, that Markham was able to glance at what he had written and to read it with understanding. A dull flush overspread his face. It was horrible from a Catholic standpoint, and he felt certain that he had been listening to and inscribing part of one of the chapters of "Back from Rome." . . . These were wallowings from anti-clerical freemason journals of the lowest gutter type.

His thoughts in the silence that followed turned insensibly to Rina, and to all that she stood for. She had tried over and over again to save him from this man's influence. Markham had come in contact with the clear radiance of her faith; he had seen its effect upon her life. And humbly for a little while he had turned aside to join her. They had been very happy, and it was he who had failed, not Rina. He found himself thinking of Sorrento with a kind of passionate wistfulness as of having held the last of those glad unclouded days. The blue of sea and sky, the scent of roses, the luxuriant green of orange and cypress grove, the sweep of purple coast, the stars, the wonderful moonlight, the still white dawns. . . . They had been lovers then, having little thought but for each other. And then all of a sudden this great figure of a man had stepped onto the scene like a grim incarnation of malevolent destiny. Imagination was so busy that he inadvertently let the pen drop from his hand. He looked up half startled and saw that Adrian was watching him with an attentive interest.

"I don't think you've got down that last sentence," said Adrian.

Markham came back to earth.

"Awfully sorry,—I'm afraid I wasn't listening. Adrian, can't we open that window? I'm feeling a bit queer."

"Better rest," said Guise, throwing open the window.

The fog had cleared and a gleam of sunlight was turning the olive trees to silver. The warmed air fragrant with roses was delicious.

"Take a turn in the *podére,*" said Adrian genially. "And I'll run up and have a look at Addie and see how she's getting on. And thanks awfully for your help, Mark."

The big man bustled away. Markham did not at first stir from his seat. He took up the paper again and read some of the passages he had inscribed. Oh, why hadn't he the strength of mind to tear it into a hundred pieces? Why hadn't he the courage to speak to Adrian and tell him quite clearly what was in his mind? Why could he think of no single thing to say in defense of the Church to which he belonged and which Rina had taught him to love and honor anew?

He went into the garden and thence into the *podére.* On the garlanded vines the bunches of green grapes were already swelling. The fog had soused everything and the long grass sparkled with dew. Below, through a dark frame of cypress trees, he could see the city shining in the sun, and the green glimmer of Val d'Arno spreading east and west beyond the pale clustering houses. A church bell rang the midday Angelus. Markham almost involuntarily crossed himself, repeating the prayer.

The gate at the end of the *podére* was opened, and he saw the figure of a man coming toward him accompanied by the little Carla dressed in her "Sunday best," a dainty little white frock that Adelaide had presented to her. The child smiled at Markham. Her close-growing sunny curls were uncovered.

"Signore——" the man began.

"You were coming up to see the Signora Guise about her taking Carla to England?" said Markham.

"Si, signore."

"I am the son-in-law of the Marchesa San Raimondo, and I am living at the Palazzo Ubinaldi. If you will take my advice you will send Carla away at once—this very day if you can. You must not let her go with these people. If she does she will not be brought up as a Catholic—she will say no prayers to the Madonna—she will learn nothing of God nor of His Son. You must not say I have spoken to you. Send the child away to the nuns—but don't let her stay here."

The man's face fell.

"But they said Carla would have a beautiful home—plenty to eat—kind people to look after her. And the Signor Guise, they told me, was baptized a Catholic."

"Take my advice," said Markham sternly. "It is not the place for Carla. Don't let her go there again. You can tell them later that you have sent her away and that she will not come back."

"The Signora will be offended," said the man, "and she has given many clothes to Carla."

"You must not let her go to them. Ask the priest, and tell him what I have told you. If you take the child away from Fiesole they will realize that you have changed your mind." He spoke almost sharply.

"Very well, I will ask the priest," said the man reluctantly.

Little Carla began to cry. She had followed the conversation sufficiently to realize that she was perhaps not to see the kind Signora at the villa again. Markham laid his hand on her fair curls.

"There, don't cry, Carla," he said, "here's a whole lira for you. Now you can buy some sweets."

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"The Signor will be angry," said the man, still hesitating.

"You must on no account let her go to them," Markham repeated. "She will lose her faith if she does, and you will be to blame because I have warned you. It will be better for you not to mention that you have seen me. Only—send Carla as soon as you can to the nuns."

"Thank you, signore. I will do as you say."

Markham went slowly back to the house. . . .

Upstairs Adelaide was saying to her husband:

"Well, how did you get on?"

Adrian smiled cynically.

"Oh, he behaved like a lamb after his first crossness at being kept waiting. He wrote at my dictation for about an hour and a half."

"Without a word? He didn't expostulate?"

"Oh, no, I'd snubbed him too well before he began. He didn't speak at all. And I went very fast—I kept him busy—he'd hardly time to think."

Adelaide put out her hand and her face became very alert and intelligent.

"You're wonderful," she said, "really wonderful. Didn't I always tell you he'd come back all right? As if you had anything to fear from a silly, uneducated girl."

"He's awfully foolish about her," said Adrian.

"He'll get over that," declared Mrs. Guise, "he isn't half so foolish as he was six months ago. But we must make him ashamed of having yielded to her about us."

"His conscience isn't easy. But he did miss Mass," said Adrian.

Adelaide pursed up her thin lips.

"That was very clever of you, Adrian," she said admiringly.

"You see, he's been in the thick of it lately," said Adrian, "what with the funeral and those perpetual Masses for the dead. He couldn't escape that."

He walked to the window expecting to see Markham in the *podére,* but his young boyish figure was lost to sight among the olive trees. "I'm not sure that he wasn't a bit scandalized this morning. Said he felt queer—asked to have the window open. I'd shut it to keep out the fog. I told him to go for a stroll. Adelaide, I'm not going to let that girl come out top-dog!"

His voice changed and became hard and violent. There was a curious gleam in his eyes that had become all at once fanatical and cruel.

"No, of course you're not," said his wife confidently.

"She's made a plucky fight, though," he said, "and she hasn't done yet."

He went down to luncheon calling Markham in from the *podére* in a loud and buoyant tone full of hearty good humor. All through the meal he maintained that pose of robust cheerfulness. But Markham was beginning to see through his moods and to chafe at that chameleon-like change of pose. It was only toward the end of luncheon that Adrian said with a sudden frown:

"These Tuscans are the most unreliable people in the world. Beppino promised faithfully to come up this morning with Carla to see you. And of course he's never been. Well, we must fix another day."

When luncheon was over Markham made some excuse and took his departure. It was in a very gloomy and depressed mood that he returned that afternoon to Florence.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"MARKHAM, I want to speak to you for a moment," said the Marchesa San Raimondo that evening. "Will you come to my room?"

It was the first time she had ever made such a request to him, for she was still on very formal terms with her son-in-law. There had been little time or opportunity for her to learn to know him better, and if there had been moments when she had secretly wondered at Rina's early infatuation she had never shown it.

Now, having discovered the cause of her daughter's secret unhappiness and anxiety, she had resolved very unwillingly and reluctantly to speak to Markham on the subject of their departure. She disliked the prospect intensely, but she felt that it was her duty to take some step of the kind, and she hoped he would not make it necessary for her to say anything about his visits to Fiesole.

Markham followed her with set face into her sitting-room. He had passed a most miserable day, and the only pleasant thing that in any way relieved him was the effort he had made—whether successfully or not it was as yet too soon to say—to prevent little Carla from being adopted by Mrs. Guise.

"It is about our leaving Florence that I wish to consult you," said Helen. "I am going to England at the end of the week, and I should be very glad if you and Rina could travel with me. You see I am not accustomed to long journeys," she added with a smile.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly go as soon as that," said Markham abruptly. "I've work to finish—things to see to——"

Helen looked at him for a second. Yes, he was very handsome, this man who had won her daugh-

ter's love, but there were certain things in his face which, joined to her present knowledge of him, made her feel very anxious. There was that weakness which she had seemed to discover for the first time the other night when Delfini had told her where Markham's days were spent. Fatherless, he had at an early age almost completely emancipated himself from his mother's authority. No doubt Mrs. Proctor had contributed to this by weakness and indulgence and to a certain extent by neglect. But the unhappy fact remained. He was lamentably obstinate, he resented any interference, and although he had signally failed to keep his promise to Rina he would not allow for a moment that he had been in the wrong.

The Marchesa was a very charitable woman. Even now with so much certain knowledge she would not condemn Markham; her instinct was rather to influence, to persuade.

"I hope you will reconsider that," she said gently, "I think Rina is in need of a change—I should like her to go as soon as possible. She has had a trying time with her grandfather's long illness."

"There is nothing to prevent Rina from going with you at the end of the week," he said coolly.

His bold eyes met hers squarely, defiantly.

"I am afraid there is no chance of Rina's consenting to go without you," said Helen. "I for one should never ask her to do such a thing. I'm old-fashioned enough to think that a wife's place is with her husband.

"I don't interfere with Rina's freedom, as you know," he said, "and I don't want her to interfere with mine. She can go home if she wants to."

"She could hardly go to Stones without you—the first time," Helen reminded him.

That at least was quite true. But she could wait

surely for him to come? And anyhow he didn't mean to say anything beforehand; he should hate the tenants and people to make a fuss.

"I should follow quite soon probably," he said.

"But you know I think the sooner you both go to Stones the better," said Helen, who felt that after all a little plain speaking had become necessary for his own sake as well as for Rina's.

Markham was silent.

"It has been a mistake—I've seen it, too—your staying so long out here."

When Helen said that in her soft level tones he became aware that she knew of his defection, of his broken promise. He wondered how she knew. Had Rina told her? He dismissed that thought from his mind. Rina was silent with the silence of reserved people to whom it is torture to reveal anything painful. Why was the Marchesa making this last and difficult effort to remove him from Adrian's proximity? Oh, they were all making a confounded fuss about nothing, he told himself passionately. Why couldn't they leave him alone?

"I have only lately learned that the Guises were here. I had no idea you were spending your time with them. If I had known I should have used every effort to persuade you to take Rina back to England."

"You attach too much importance to my friendship with these people," said Markham, thinking of the humiliations he had suffered that very morning from Adrian.

"I can only see its effects," said Helen; "it is separating you from Rina. It is making her very unhappy."

"Because she won't be reasonable and accept the situation," he declared with a touch of anger.

"But its effect upon Rina is by no means the worse

part," pursued Helen. "That is the selfish human side. I am thinking of you—of your own safety. You don't seem to realize the peril you are exposing yourself to. Mr. Guise is said to be a very powerful man, and very unscrupulous. It is his chosen work to try to destroy the faith of others in our holy religion. And he *has* been known to destroy the faith of weak and proud people who deliberately placed themselves under his influence. You know as well as I do that he is a most dangerous apostate. When I let my daughter marry you I made the stipulation that you were to renounce this friendship. I am not going to reproach you for your broken promise. But I do say that since these people have come back into your life you have little by little given up the practice of your religion, and you are slowly separating yourself from Rina—who loves you."

Her voice trembled a little. At that moment she had a very strong maternal feeling toward Markham. She felt that if he had been her own son she would have said exactly those words to him. She had often wished for a son; she had often listened with envy in the old days when Janet Proctor had spoken to her of the wonderful prowess and intelligence of her baby Markham.

She spoke in such a quiet way that perhaps her grave words gained additional effect. Markham at any rate listened without interrupting. There was something about her then that irresistibly recalled Rina to his mind, and he did not think he had been sensible of any likeness between them before. But they were both significant people, both had beauty and personality. Only Rina had the more arresting loveliness added to that peculiar grace and charm which were not quite English and which still fascinated Markham.

"Rina has been complaining of me, I suppose?" he said at last with an injured air.

"You know that is not the case," said Helen. "If she had I am afraid I should not have had the courage to say anything to you."

He rose.

"Is that all you have to say to me?"

He had no desire to prolong the interview, which he earnestly felt should never have taken place.

"I think that is all," said Helen. "I intend to start for England as I said toward the end of the week. Perhaps later you will tell me if you and Rina intend to travel with me."

"I shall certainly not come. Rina is perfectly free to do just as she likes."

He kissed her hand—Markham rarely forgot his manners—and then went out of the room. It was impossible, he told himself, for a man to submit to such tyranny as they proposed to exercise. And he was not ready to leave Florence. There was work to be finished. There were visits to be paid. But it would simplify matters enormously if Rina were to accompany her mother. They could go down to Queen's Barn together. A few weeks of such separation would be good for them both—they were beginning to get on each other's nerves.

He went out restlessly. It was a lovely June evening and the streets were thronged. Strings of motors and carriages were passing by; he caught glimpses within them of lovely dark-eyed women, of darling children, enjoying the evening drive. He walked along the Lung'Arno toward the Cascine. The river was flooded with golden light; the picturesque houses, the old brick campanile on the opposite side were rosy in the sunset. There were delicate hues of green, of pink and yellow in those

old buildings that dipped to the river. . . . No, he did not want to leave it yet, and go back to Stones as Helen suggested. The thought of a settled life in the country fretted him even in imagination. He told himself that he had never really cared for Stones. Just at the time of his marriage he had pictured an ordered leisurely tranquil existence there, with Rina in all her young beauty at his side. There would be no lack of occupation for him; the place needed its master. Rina had wished to live there. She had liked the old place with all its history, its Catholic traditions. The remembrance caught at his heart. How far apart they were now from those early bridal days. It came upon Markham then with something like a shock that their marriage was already what people would call a failure. He was even deliberately envisaging the thought that she should return to England without him the very first time that she had ever been there since her marriage. She a bride to go back without her husband! She had no home in England except Stones, and she could not go to Stones without him. Even he saw the impossibility of that, it would be indeed a tacit ironical confession of failure which she would certainly be too proud to permit.

"She might stay in town till I come," he thought, "or she can go to the Ellingtons with her mother." But what could she possibly say to the Ellingtons? How could she account for Markham's absence—for his alleged preference for Florence? He remembered that Lady Ellington had been firmly opposed to their engagement. No, he could not thrust Rina into an anomalous position such as that, even if for her mother's sake she submitted to it. Of course she would do a great deal for her mother; he had seen how close, how intimate, were the ties between them. Since the death of the old prince

they had seemed more like sisters than mother and daughter.

Well, he had disappointed them both. Helen had done her best to safeguard her daughter from an unwise marriage; it had been from no idle motive that she had struggled to separate him definitely from Adrian Guise. And she had failed. And he had been blamed by both sides, he had not succeeded in pleasing anybody.

Suddenly he saw Adrian's enormous figure approaching him. He was dressed in a light suit of gray flannel which emphasized his huge proportions. He looked unusually conspicuous, and for one wild moment Markham hoped that he had not observed him.

But Adrian had the eyes of a lynx; he detected Markham's feeble little effort to lose himself in the crowd of pedestrians. He came up to him, and towering above him held out his hand.

"Well, my dear Mark! Looking for Beatrice?"

Markham flushed.

"I am not looking for any one," he answered.

"You ran away in such a hurry this afternoon that I quite forgot to ask you to do a little commission at the chemist's for me. So I came down to do it myself."

They walked on for a little way in silence.

"By the way, I've sent a message to Beppino to come to-morrow. I want to know why he didn't turn up to-day."

Markham felt a little guilty.

"I hope to goodness they don't back out of it at the last moment. Addie will be awfully cut up if they do."

Markham still kept silence. He was afraid that Beppino questioned by an irate Adrian might reveal the part he had himself played in the matter.

"I suppose you couldn't come up and see him, too?" inquired Adrian, perplexed at Markham's continued silence and wondering if it could be accounted for by the events of the morning.

"No, I'm afraid not. You see I've a lot to do. I may be leaving for England at the end of the week."

Somehow with Adrian there in front of him the prospect of going to England suddenly gained in attraction. He longed to turn his back on all the complications that had arisen—to cut himself clear of it all.

He realized the wisdom of Helen's gently proffered advice.

Adrian stopped short.

"Do you mean you're going back to Stones?" he inquired with a short laugh.

"We should naturally go to Stones," said Markham, "my *gourbi* in Chelsea is only fit for a bachelor."

"You will forgive my saying so," said Guise, "but judging from your face the prospect seems to be filling you with an unnatural gloom!"

Markham strode on. He did not want to discuss his departure with Adrian, who would he knew try to persuade him to remain. And he was just beginning to see how impossible it would be for Rina to go without him. He could not so humiliate her! He felt less gloomy than helpless and perplexed. He seemed to have made a mess of things!

"When did they spring this new move on you?" inquired Adrian.

"This evening—before I came out," said Markham.

"They must have been hatching the plot ever since the funeral. But it's up to you to refuse, Mark!"

"I don't even know that I want to refuse. Our home is at Stones and I suppose the sooner we go back and take up our life there the better. We're only idling here."

"That depends," said Adrian, "I should defer the evil day myself. But no doubt you know your own powers of endurance better than I do." He looked at him with the scornful expression that Markham had learned to hate as well as to fear. "But you'll never be able to stick it, you know, Mark. The chapel, the priest always hovering about, joining in the general solicitude about your soul. You'll forgive my saying so, but you were cut out for something better and higher than that. Don't grow stout and elderly and pragmatic before your time!"

Markham laughed bitterly.

"Most people would consider themselves jolly lucky to possess such a place," he said.

Once it had seemed to him so beautiful—this old Catholic house that was his. He remembered the last talks he had had with Father Laurence before he left England to be married. The mission was to prosper as it could never prosper with Stones empty and shut up half the year. It was to be what it had been in his father's lifetime, a model Catholic village such as is seldom to be found now in England. He had made a timid suggestion that he would enlarge the little chapel as his father had intended to do. He would rebuild the schools. All these activities had seemed well worth while then; he had even thought of them as a kind of thank-offering for the immense happiness that had been vouchsafed to him. How was it that in a few months he had traveled so far from that point of view that he could only view the prospect now with repugnance and distaste? And why did Adrian go out

of his way to paint it in such dark, unattractive hues, imbuing it with impossible gloom?

"Even if I don't travel home with my wife and her mother I shall have to follow in a few weeks," he said.

"I should seize upon the respite," said Adrian with one of his brilliant, challenging smiles. "You might come up and stay with us for a bit. It'll be quite shipshape as soon as Addie's better, and she was more like herself this afternoon. We should be delighted to have you."

"It is awfully kind of you to suggest it. But I'm afraid it's quite out of the question."

"If you think it over you'll find it won't seem half so impossible," said Adrian encouragingly.

"I must be turning back," said Markham.

When they had gone a little distance on their homeward way, they met Maria Binaldi walking with Toni. Bows were exchanged, but she did not attempt to stop and speak to them. Toni's cold and haughty look, his stiff greeting, secretly exasperated Markham. He wished with all his heart that he had not met Adrian; he disliked under the circumstances being seen walking with him.

"You will hardly believe it," he said when they had passed, "but the old prince tried to arrange a marriage between my wife and that man Delfini."

"And why not?" said Adrian blandly; "from what I know of them both I think it would have been entirely suitable!"

"Suitable? What do you mean? He's nearly twice her age!"

"They are both perfect specimens of the Black Catholic Party. They put their religion before everything else, which is always uncomfortable for people who are not Black at all. One must be bred

in that atmosphere of pious intrigue to be able to breathe in it. But it is not for the free!"

Adrian expanded his chest and drank in great mouthfuls of the warm, delicious June air. Then he said:

"And you don't like it yourself, Mark; it's no good pretending that you do. In England you naturally couldn't grasp the significance of your wife's surroundings here, and naturally you rebelled. And since you've rebelled, I suppose they've treated you as if you were something between a naughty boy and a lost soul or something equally degrading and absurd. Remain a Catholic by all means if your intellect permits you to do so; but do try to avoid being the kind of Catholic they want you to be! Avoid the example of Conte Delfini—he is not one of the Illuminati!"

Now they were nearing the old palace. The narrow street was all in deep shadow. Between the heavy crossed bars of iron that so securely guarded the lower windows a faint radiance as of electric light showed. They paused, and Adrian surveyed the beautiful cortile with a frank admiration. The sweep of green grass that was always assiduously watered through the summer months; the fountain playing in the middle presided over by the marble figure of a boy pouring water from a conch into a dolphin's mouth, whose leaning pose was the delicious capture of a happy moment; the soft gloom of the branching ilex-trees, the rosy splashes on walls tapestried with blossom, made a very perfect picture indeed. It suggested tradition and dignity, a sequence of ordered lives, rich perhaps and leisurely, but detached from passing fashion—lives that were controlled by the central fact of faith, handed down from generation to generation.

Suddenly, as they stood there, a figure emerged from the shadows of the ilex-trees—a slight, black-clad figure with shining uncovered hair. Markham involuntarily made a movement toward Rina.

Adrian noticed it and smiled.

"Good-by. Think over what I said. Remember you are always welcome. Addie will be charmed."

"Thanks," said Markham hastily.

Adrian, looking back from the street, saw him hurrying toward his wife with the eager feet of youth. He saw, too, that Rina paused to wait for him. Arm in arm they walked slowly toward the house.

He guessed that the next few days would be crucial and difficult ones for Markham. He was not quite so confident as Adelaide that they were going to win after all.

CHAPTER XXIX

FOR the next day or two nothing more was said about the proposed journey to England, but there was a subdued bustle in the old palace that was indicative of coming change. The Marchesa knew that she was leaving her old home never to return, and the thought naturally caused her a good deal of sorrow. If she had had a son instead of a daughter, she would perhaps never have had to leave it. But the old prince had wished that the family of Ubinaldi should continue in possession of it, and therefore he had made his young great-nephew the heir to the property after his own death.

Perhaps when she returned from England Helen would go back to the palace to fetch such furniture

and property as were hers, and arrange for their removal to the villa at Settignano. But she would never come back to it as to her own home; already by that time it would have passed into the hands of these people, who were almost strangers to her.

But her own fate and future destiny were not just then matters of primary importance to her. She was far more anxious about Rina, about Rina's future and Rina's happiness.

She wished she could have believed that during her stay in England she could have seen her safely settled and established at Stones. Rina had married a rich man with a beautiful property, and she was in every way fitted for that English life, of the kind Helen had herself known before her marriage —the life of a Catholic country house in England with its own mission and its little nucleus of the faithful close at hand.

Helen felt that she had never been ambitious for Rina where wealth was concerned, but she had always been glad to think that Markham could give her just that beautiful environment which seemed to her so desirable. But what if, after all, he refused to live there in the future as he had refused in the past? She could see that he actually shrank from the idea of returning to Stones, and from taking up the life that awaited him there. But she traced this gloomy reluctance to its right source, and felt certain it was due to the influence of Adrian Guise.

It hurt her pride, though, to think that her daughter should be neglected and set on one side for such a man as that. No doubt his influence over Markham had been far greater in the old days than she or any one else had realized. But Markham's efefforts to free himself had never been either very sustained or very sincere. He had returned almost

with eagerness to that old allegiance. Helen had learned through Toni of that chance meeting at Sorrento, and she saw that a single meeting had sufficed to do all the mischief. And had it been a chance one, or was it true as Rina had suggested, that the Guises had thought it worth while to follow Markham to Italy?

Rina had been collecting her books one morning, and had piled them in little heaps on the table of her sitting-room. Her library as a girl had not been very extensive and consisted largely of books of piety, lives of saints, and a few English and Italian classics.

She was busy with this task when Markham came into the room. All these days he had seemed restless and perturbed as if he disliked the prospect of the change that was to affect them all.

"What are you going to do with those?" he asked.

"They are to be packed. I shall take them to England."

"Are you going to England?" Markham asked.

She looked at him in surprise.

"But aren't we all going on Saturday?" she said.

"I certainly am not. I told your mother so quite clearly."

"Mother seemed to think you hadn't quite made up your mind. You see, I can't very well let her travel alone with only an Italian maid, who doesn't speak a word of English. I feel I ought to go with her."

"You must do exactly as you please. You are perfectly free," Markham assured her.

"But, Markham, won't you really come with us? I feel as if I couldn't go home like that—the first time—without you!"

"Oh, Rina, that's all nonsense. We are both free to do as we like."

"I don't want that sort of freedom," she said quietly.

"I shall follow very soon," said Markham; "we can meet then in town and go down to Stones together, and help each other to bear those terrible, triumphal arches, and God bless the Happy Pair!"

His light, ironical tone hurt her.

Once she had had visions of a beautiful homecoming—almost too sacred for speech—in the gray shadows of an English summer evening. The last afterglow lying in dull gold upon the woods of the valley. Perhaps a faint line of more brilliant light illuminating the summits of the Cotswold hills. . . . Stones, gray in its ancient, austere splendor, waiting to receive them, to gather in these, the last of the house.

The last? Yes, but she had pictured other lives grouped around them—lives that should in their turn carry on and hand down the traditions of the old place. Was it not for this also that Markham and she had loved each other?

"Oh, Markham," she said in pitiful remonstrance.

He seemed so unaware that he was killing her cherished dreams. He sat down at the table, glanced carelessly at the titles of the books, read a line here and there.

"Look here, Rina," he said. "I'm inclined to think we shall both be all the better for a week or two apart. We seem to be getting on each other's nerves. You've tried to mould me to your pattern, and you have failed, so nothing I can say or do pleases you. You have fallen into precisely the same mistakes my mother did with precisely the same results. If you will only be reasonable and

take me as I am, we shall learn to knock along as comfortably as most people, I hope."

His tone was light, and yet there was a hardness in it that was new to her.

"Do you understand me, Rina?

She said slowly:

"Yes, I think I quite understand."

But she felt as if he had drawn a heavy dark curtain across her life, filling it with deep shadows. Yes, it had been a failure, this marriage of theirs, and she had failed, too, in her effort to rescue him from the threatened peril to faith. Slowly but surely he was slipping away into a negligence more pronounced than any he had shown before his marriage. And Markham had also come to perceive the failure of their marriage; perhaps he had even cynically discussed it with Adrian. To her there was something terrible in his easy acceptance of the situation.

"That's right," he said. "And though I intend you to be perfectly free, I may as well tell you that I should greatly prefer you to go home with your mother, so that we can have this little time apart. I shall follow very soon. I want to think things out. . . . But, of course, we can't entirely ignore Stones."

She had never felt so strongly as she did at that moment that Markham was a stranger to her. As long as he had been enveloped in the rosy glamour of love he had been both dear and intimate; their very thoughts had run to meet each other's. Now in the cold and pitiless light of disillusion he was a stranger—almost a hostile one—who yet possessed as no stranger ever would, the power to deal heart-breaking blows.

She felt suddenly cold, her heart sank; she had a sense even of diminished physical energy. She could

not cry: her tears were all dried up long ago. She wondered how long she would go on loving Markham—loving him in a way that hurt her pride, and seemed to have become almost a degrading passion since he no longer loved her at all. For had he not plainly told her that he did not love her? Try as she would, she could put no other interpretation upon his careless, wounding words, cynical, heartless. How could they ever come together again with the old love and confidence between them, each bearing the memory of such bitter words?

"Very well, Markham," she said. "Since you wish it, I will go home with mother."

"But isn't it just what you've said you felt to be your duty? I'm trying to relieve you of any remaining scruples."

He was beginning to picture those few free days that were to be his, spent perhaps (he had not quite made up his mind, so he assured himself secretly) in the cool peace of Fiesole. It was to be like old times—this visit to the Guises, who were both so eager to have him. He looked forward to the recovery of friendship, sympathy, the old intellectual intercourse. And no return in the evening to read mute reproach in Rina's eyes, nor be made aware through her silence of the cold disapproval of Helen.

Rina went out of the room. She held her head royally even in this hour of defeat, and even Markham was constrained to admire the undaunted dignity of her poise. There was far too much of race in her to permit her to cry out, to shed weak tears. Watching her, he felt almost afraid of what he had done. Supposing she were to leave him—finally, irrevocably? Supposing she were to refuse to go to Stones when his fancy chose to summon her thither?

No, she was too good a Catholic for that. She

would always be ready to receive his overtures of peace, to welcome the prodigal home. He need have no fear of that.

A few days at Fiesole would restore his poise and perhaps give him a clear vision of how best to act in the future. These daily discussions and half-veiled recriminations fretted the nerves and made it impossible to arrange one's life on practical lines. He wanted, as he had just told Rina, to think things out. And surely in this task Adrian and Adelaide would help him.

CHAPTER XXX

No more was said. The situation was accepted without further demur by both Rina and her mother. Markham accompanied them to the station on the following Saturday afternoon when they left for Milan, where they intended to break their journey. He saw them into the train, provided them with papers, made himself useful in looking after their luggage, of which neither had a great deal. He kissed Helen's hand, and then turned to Rina. But when he kissed her it seemed to him that she shrank a little away from him. Perhaps, though, that was his fancy. It was almost a relief to him when the long train steamed slowly out of the station. He went back immediately to the old palace and, collecting his own luggage, he hired an automobile to take him to Fiesole. It had been supposed that he would put up at a hotel for the remainder of his stay in Florence, and he purposely left no address, telling the servants that he would call for his letters.

Between the high pale walls that jealously guard-

ed the lovely ilex-shaded gardens within, under the interlacing branches of tall trees and torrents of blossoming roses, the motor sped on its way. Drifts of olive-trees covered the hills, a foam of silver gray. Fiesole stood out clearly now, the gray of its fortress-like walls, the black masses of its cypress groves, beautiful, ancient, austere. He saw the blue, wooded hump of Monte Ceceri, its bare summit surmounted by a cross, rising before him. Behind it the sky was like a blue lake unsullied by cloud. He saw villas nestling on the hillsides, pale amid the darkness of the trees, peaceful and secure habitations. Now he could see his own destination, standing a little farther away, remote, appearing only furtively and, as it were, in glimpses.

And only then, when it was too late to repair what he had done, did he have the sudden thought that he had wounded Rina past forgiveness.

Why had he come? Was it only to show his independence, his determination to control his own life in the way that seemed good to himself? He could not be ruled and governed and coerced because of that foolish promise which he had made under stress of circumstances. Adrian was right when he preached the doctrine of individual freedom. One must secure that at all costs. He must not begin now to let his courage fail, to ask himself if it had been worth while. The look on Rina's face—a look of perfectly calm acquiesence—haunted him. She had gone back to England without him, and he had had no excuse whatever for remaining behind. But she had put a brave face on the humiliation to which he had exposed her. Yet she need not have gone—she had been perfectly free to stay.

The motor sped up the narrow cypress avenue,

and he saw Adelaide standing to welcome him in the loggia.

"So you have really come!" She greeted him in low, trailing tones. "We were so afraid that you would show symptoms of weakness at the last. But any effort of will is worth while. Its effect on the character can never be negative."

Markham felt himself praised. How near he had been to that shameful weakness in those last hours only his own heart knew.

"You see, it was such an incentive—coming up here," he said, and his eyes rested on the lovely scene outspread before him.

They were sitting on basket-chairs in the loggia. Markham lit a cigarette. The warm sunshine, the stillness of the air, the shrilling of the cicalas, imparted a sensation of physical indolence that was very agreeable.

"Where's Adrian?" he asked at last.

Somehow it was a relief not to hear Guise's booming bass voice.

"Gone for a walk—he'll be home at tea-time. He's gone to see Beppino—he's never been here again, you know. And Carla hasn't been near us. How odd these peasants are."

Markham began to hope that Beppino would be discreet in his interview with Adrian.

"Now I want to hear all about it," said Adelaide smiling.

"About it?"

"About your wife's going away like this."

"Oh, there's nothing to tell," said Markham, reddening a little. "She thought it was her duty to go home with her mother, and I relieved her of her few remaining scruples by telling her I preferred this arrangement."

"She must be singularly reasonable," said Mrs.

Guise, who had never left her husband for a single day. She had an odd, instinctive jealousy of Adrian.

"Of course, when it came to the point, I didn't like letting her go," continued Markham. "You see, we've never been home since we were married. They're planning to make a fuss at Stones—a regular old-fashioned welcome, you know. And she can't go to Stones until I'm there to go with her."

"Shall you really sit in a carriage and let the tenants take out the horses and pull it themselves, and all that kind of feudal system sort of thing?" inquired Adelaide, in a drawling, contemptuous tone.

"Oh, I hope it won't be quite as bad as that," said Markham laughing with something of his old boyish gaiety.

"Mark, you'll be simply wasted in that kind of atmosphere. With your talents—your wealth—you could have such a splendid life!"

"It's unavoidable, though," said Markham, "and my marriage has made it even more inevitable. My wife is very fond of Stones."

"She would be," said Adelaide.

He went on without apparently noticing the interruption. "And she is looking forward to living there. It's too late to go over that old ground."

"Nothing is ever irremediable unless we submit to laws that were never made for us. You took a very wrong impulsive step, and now you are suffering from the impetuous rashness. We had so warned you against the peril of suddenly falling in love and allowing it to conquer your reason, even if only temporarily. Your mother was bound to find a girl fully as bigoted as herself to throw at your head. You ought to have been more on your guard. Now here you are at twenty-eight tied for life. I'm sorry for you, but it's the whole system that maddens me. If you ever tried to free yourself it could only be by

a complete rupture of all the old chains and bars. It is more difficult for Catholics than for any one else, because their Church refuses to recognize any form of divorce. They are centuries behind the times in this as in everything else. I am very sorry for you—you've made such a mess of things, and I don't think you've got Adrian's kind of courage to extricate yourself altogether. Yet, who can say it's your fault? You are the victim of your mother's perpetual intriguing. I wish I knew her—I should like to tell her what I think about her. You were such a boy to be entrapped into matrimony at all!"

There was a very pronounced touch of indignation in her tone that made Markham pleasantly feel that he had been ill-used.

He was indeed the injured victim of an unholy little intrigue, designed to separate him from his old friends, who had his true welfare at heart. For a moment he was filled with self-pity. He was a prisoner; he could feel the cold touch of the bars. Because he was a Catholic he was less free even than other men. The Church behind the times? Every one said so. And he was not like Adrian; he could not extricate himself; he had not that kind of courage. He had made, he now assured himself, the most horrible mess of his life. And once he had believed that life could hold nothing better nor more lovely than an ordered Catholic existence at Stones with his beautiful young wife beside him!

What had happened to bring about this violent change in him? Was Rina to blame? Yet—how he had loved her, how he had dreaded lest anything should come between them to prevent their marriage! How he had prayed, as he had never prayed before in his life, that she might be his wife.

He could not see how truly he was a victim, how fast he was held behind prison bars by these people,

from whose influences he was unable to free himself. . . .

"I imagine I am quite as responsible as my mother in the matter," he said with a sudden poignant remembrance of those weeks of waiting while his marriage had hung in the balance. "I fell in love, I married—I was fool enough to think that love was a permanent magic to crystallize changes as well as to effect them. I was changed, Adelaide, in those first weeks, I hardly knew myself. I was very happy. I was almost—I am not ashamed to say it—devout. That future life at Stones seemed to me as to Rina perfectly ideal."

His face was curiously changed and softened. What had happened to alter him so? Was it his doing or Rina's? Who had failed?

"And now?" said Mrs. Guise, looking at him with half-closed eyes.

"Now I am unworthy—unfit—call it what you like. I'm further from my faith than I've ever been. I can't take the necessary steps to go back to the practice of my religion. They are too hard now. I suppose I shall end by giving it all up. One doesn't do that in a moment, I'm sure. One drifts and drifts. . . ." He visualized a pale, shoreless sea, uncharted, limitless, its horizon hidden in deep clouds. "Adrian told me once he hovered for some years on the brink. Somehow, before I married it never entered my head that I could become an apostate, even though I was getting careless."

"I'm afraid it's still beyond your courage, Mark," said Adelaide; "you'll get a summons to go home—your wife will probably scrape up an illness and play on your feelings in that way. You will go back then—you'll go to Stones, and then atmosphere, environment, and the priests will do the rest."

There was a veiled scorn in her voice.

"I only wish I could see myself going back to Stones," said Markham drearily.

Adrian's appearance at that moment created a little diversion. He was hearty, even a little triumphant.

"Well, Mark, my boy! Delighted to see you." He laid a patronizing hand on the younger man's shoulder. "We never felt quite sure that you'd turn up, as I daresay Addie's told you!"

"I'm here all right," said Markham with a pale smile.

He thought of that train speeding northward over the Apennines, toward the golden glowing plains of Lombardy. Why was he not in it, sitting opposite to Rina?

Adrian threw himself into one of the basket-chairs.

"Did you see Beppino?" inquired Adelaide.

"Yes. Queer people these are. I couldn't make head or tail of what he said—he jabbered so. I'll take Mark down there to-morrow to act as interpreter. But the curious thing is that Carla isn't there. There was some talk of a grandmother. Didn't you understand, Addie, that there wasn't anybody—no one at least nearer than an uncle and aunt?"

There was a little pause. "I certainly thought so," said Adelaide.

"Perhaps the priest has been getting at them," suggested Adrian gloomily.

"But you don't mean they've sent Carla away for good?" exclaimed his wife. "Has this grandmother person claimed her?"

"She isn't there. I can't tell you anything more. They've shown the most crass ingratitude, spiriting the child away like this. I wonder what they can have got hold of?"

"But I thought it was settled—all but the formalities," said Mrs. Guise. "Adrian—I can't believe it. You must go down there again with Mark after tea, and you must tell them that they can't back out of it now. If they want more money you can give them more. But we must have Carla!"

In all his life Markham had never seen her so seriously upset. For the moment he felt quite aghast at the consequences of his action. No doubt Beppino had been seized with alarm and had probably confided the whole story to his parish priest, who had recommended the simplest course of sending the child out of harm's way.

"It's no use our going down there again now," said Adrian, "and it's a long, hot walk. We must wait till to-morrow. They're a bit excited too—safer to let them alone. Do give me some tea, Addie."

Markham looked at Mrs. Guise, and to his astonishment and, it must also be added, to his dismay, he saw that there were tears in her eyes. He had never seen her cry before, and had always considered her far too strong-minded for any such feminine weakness. Had she so set her heart upon taking little Carla to England? He ought never to have interfered. After all, the child would have had a good home, plenty to eat and drink, kind people to bring her up.

She burst out with sudden anger:

"We have got enemies here, Adrian! Mark, did you ever tell your people anything about Carla?"

"No, I never mentioned the subject to them," Markham was now thankful to be able to say. "If they've heard anything, it can't be through them."

"I hate the feeling of having secret enemies trying to check you at every turn," said Mrs. Guise with a sob.

"Come, come, Addie, don't make a fuss," said Adrian in a bracing tone.

"Oh, it's all very well to talk, but you never wanted to have her at all—you said she would be in the way. It was I who wanted her! And I won't be cheated by these ignorant, priest-ridden peasants!"

She was really sobbing now in an angry uncontrolled way that made Markham feel exceedingly uncomfortable.

"My dear Addie, if you want to cry go and cry in your room. Don't give poor Mark the benefit of it. He has enough of the tyranny of tears in his own home." Adrian spoke almost brutally, and Mrs. Guise dried her tears at once and looked at him almost with apprehension.

Was she afraid of him, Markham wondered idly? A woman might well be afraid of such a man possessing that enormous physical strength combined with a complete lack of scruple.

"Mark must go there to-morrow," she said again. "He will be able to talk to them—to persuade them." Her face brightened hopefully. "And I'd been down to choose such lovely frocks for her. She was to have everything—everything." Again her eyes filled.

"There are hundreds of other brats who'd take her place to-morrow," said Adrian unsympathetically.

"I hate being *done,*" said his wife. "And I wanted Carla!"

"Well, it's all very mysterious, and Beppino was very queer in his manner. He seemed to have become almost hostile as if I'd no right even to ask what he'd done with Carla. Somebody must have said something to put them off. Why, they were quite keen at first."

The little episode had cast a gloom upon the three people. They went on with their tea in silence, and during the hours that followed, Markham found himself desperately trying to recover something of the old pleasure and sympathy he had felt in his intercourse with the Guises. But little things jarred and hurt him almost beyond bearing. It was not long before they abandoned the discussion of Beppino's defection and began to talk of Markham's own affairs. The way his marriage was so frankly discussed and dissected made him wince more than once. They took it so for granted that it was a failure. His very coming substantially endorsed their view. It was a triumph for him over the chains and fetters, and he could not bring himself to tell them that it had been accomplished without any supreme effort of will on his part. Helen had yielded, above all, Rina had yielded, and he had trodden almost savagely upon two supine victims. Was it possible for a man ever to become so emancipated from what they termed fetters that conscience itself would grow dumb? Would it take long to become a law unto oneself and feel happy and secure in that position of unassailable liberty?

Before night came he was already miserable. A chance word of pity from Adrian plunged him into a deep and silent gloom. Again he wished himself in the train with Rina, watching the stars come out in all their piercing brilliance above the dim purple shapes of the Apennines. He thought of the day of his arrival in Florence just before the wedding. How happy he had been! So full of joy and hope, with fear and suspense and uncertainty relegated to the background. He had been in a state of grace—at least that was his hope—and that perhaps is one of the supremest joys of a Catholic life. Rina was his good angel, who had saved him from insidious

perils. He sprang up from his seat—they were sitting in the loggia after dinner—and walked rapidly up and down. This action, following upon a period of morose silence, irritated his host.

"For heaven's sake, sit still, Mark. You're infernally restless to-night. Don't give us the benefit of your uneasy conscience."

Markham sat down and turned his face away from Adrian as if he had been struck.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE next morning Markham awoke early after a disturbed and restless night. His room faced south, but by leaning a little forward he had a wide view east and west. It was one of those marvels of Italian summer dawns, rose-colored but with the fairness and luster of a pearl. The whole city was bathed in that rose-colored light as if it were floating in a sea of pink mist. He had seen Florence looking sometimes like a city of the New Jerusalem wrought of gold and pearl when he had recalled Browning's words:

"In the valley beneath where white and wide
Washed by the morning's water-gold,
Florence lay out on the mountain side."

He had seen her, too, lying as if in a mirage when her very streets seemed to be wrought of palest silver and fragile ivory, but never until now had he seen her dyed and dipped in ethereal rose-color.

How dark the cypresses and ilex-trees looked now, outlined against that pale radiance of sky.

They gave the value of absolute blackness to the landscape, and yet there was something soft and delicate in that darkness. Between the lustrous boughs of umbrella-pines he saw spaces of sky of brilliant pallor touched, too, with rose-pink. In an hour or two the sky would stretch from east to west a cloudless and unbroken canopy of blue, freed from the mystery of dawn that now touched the world and made Florence seem like a beautiful magic city of dreams.

The night had been a troubled one for Markham, but the vision of the new day brought a temporary peace to his heart. It would not be permanent—that he knew. Across the valley he could hear the bells ringing for the first Mass; the sound broke sharply across his reverie. He knew that not for long could he banish those cruel, crowding thoughts that were already knocking at the door of his mind. He had awakened with that gloomy, acute sense of almost formless calamity that has not yet revealed itself clearly. Then he suddenly remembered.

Rina had gone. Already she had reached the first stage of her journey. By this evening she would be no longer in Italy. That parting had become for many weeks past a matter almost of necessity. Day by day the estrangement had deepened between them, widening the gulf. Markham could trace the course of that change. It had begun at Sorrento, when Adrian and his wife had first appeared upon the scene. Then had come the swift first reconciliation, the false peace that knows itself menaced by the shadow of a resumed conflict. The episode had a little faded when the Guises arrived in Florence. From that time things had gone from bad to worse, and nothing had prospered. The more close and intimate his renewed friendship with Adrian and

his wife had become, the more definite had appeared the breach between himself and Rina. At first she had remonstrated—she had been over-bold, perhaps, in that pitiful attempt of hers to regain him. And then gradually, as it seemed to him, she had grown calm and indifferent and had occupied herself almost wholly with other things. She was absorbed in the task of helping to nurse her old grandfather; the shadows of the sick-room swallowed her up. He used to see her coming and going, detached, diligent, grave. He might have felt jealous in her absorption in other cares so soon after their marriage, if he had not welcomed it as a door that led to his own greater liberty. It procured him an uncontested freedom. He was able to spend half his days at Fiesole; it was a relief from the gathering gloom of the old palace. And now—all that part of his life had come to an abrupt end. Rina had gone home with her mother, and they would never again inhabit the Palazzo Ubinaldi. Soon strangers would come to take possession of it. Children would scamper down the long corridors and passages, and their young voices would echo through those once silent and hushed rooms. He had loved at first its grave, dignified splendor—the splendor of another day, of another age. For a time he had been very happy there. Then had come the Guises. That thought, too, he brushed hastily aside. Rina and he had quarreled like almost every other young married couple. And he had let her go home alone. Some day, though—it was impossible to escape it—he would have to go home and take her to Stones. Or else?

Or else he would never return. Not because his love for her was dead, since one sight of her beautiful face would be sufficient, he knew, to recall it, not in its first flamelike ardor, perhaps, but touched

to a more complex passion irritated and intensified by the alienating change that had sprung up between them. No—it was the kind of life which they would lead together at Stones from which he recoiled. Adelaide and Adrian had often painted it for him with a few malicious, cynical touches; they had shown him as the victim of a narrow, soul-enslaving routine. Such words had made him harden his heart against Rina, against his home, against his religion.

If he followed Adrian's advice he would renounce both wife and faith, and lead a life of perfect and joyous freedom; he saw himself the hero of a little company of freed kindred souls, who had flung off their fetters and took their pleasure where they would.

Had he never cared, then, for Rina, he asked himself now, with something of sorrow? If not, why had he been so ready, even eager, to renounce these friends of his in order to win her? He had indeed been so deeply in love that he had found joy in her ready sympathy; he had felt the spiritual bonds that existed between them; his only fear had been that he would lose her through his own unworthiness. And he had come very near to losing her, on that point he had never deceived himself. Then how suddenly the whole fabric of their life together had fallen to pieces. How suddenly all those spiritual ideals had become trivial and galling. So he had let her go. What an effort would be required to return. It would be for him a tacit acknowledgment of defeat. There would be pride abased, humiliating surrender. For there had been between him and Rina none of the ordinary differences that usually assail newly-married people, the little incompatibilities and idiosyncrasies, resented at first and then forgiven and condoned, and gradually

forgotten as the sharp edges were worn down by the continuance of a deep mutual affection and sympathy, and the intimate sharing of joys and sorrows. His differences with Rina had been in the main spiritual. Their wounds had gone deep, touching their souls. And if they were ever to resume the old happy life together, the change must come from him. Rina could never change; she could never become a careless Catholic, content with fulfilling the exact letter of her duties; she could still less become an Adelaide Guise, utterly defiant of all laws, a moral anarchist. Those stained byways were not for Rina. Although she was young her character was solidly formed. At the time of their marriage he had felt that she had held out two strong arms to rescue him and draw him away from nebulous perils of which she had been instinctively aware. He had the feeling of being saved from floods that would have overwhelmed him. He knew better than she the vastness of the danger, and had believed the change in himself to be permanent and secure, founded upon a love that colored and swayed his least action. It was a mutual surrender, for he knew that the very beating of her heart was his. And he had estranged and alienated and perhaps broken that heart that had given him its first and perhaps its last love.

Oh, there were bound to be moments like these, he told himself, when "he walked alone and reviewed the past," and would be compelled to look at the hard, grim facts, scourged perhaps by conscience to the task, would have to weigh with scrupulous exactitude the sum of loss and gain. He would have to envisage his failure toward Rina. If her life was to be wrecked through this marriage, the fault would be his. And at such moments, too, he was bound to see in himself the weak and worthless

figure he must appear also in her eyes, and in the eyes of Helen and of his own mother. Was that indeed the true Markham Proctor who was unworthy of his own proud heritage? All the flattering sense of being master of his fate, the hero who had won in hard fight the priceless gift of liberty, could never quite expunge the vision of that other figure shorn of truth and honor.

The rosy light had faded now, the sun had risen high above the wooded hill of Vallombrosa, and filled mountain and valley with its fresh, sparkling gold. From convent and monastery and parish church the bells were ringing their sweet jangle. Markham dressed and went out into the *podére* where the grass was drenched with dew and shining like diamonds. Tall white Madonna lilies gave forth a delicious perfume. There was a little soft wind that touched his forehead like a caress. It revived him. He thought, after all, that he would go for a walk. Only the servants were astir; there was no sign of Adrian, and the wooden shutters were still fastened across his bedroom window.

With a little fear of being watched from the windows he hurriedly descended the cypress avenue to the gate. It was open, and once beyond it he walked with more leisurely footsteps up the white-walled, dusty lane beyond. At the corner there was a little shrine, built into the wall. A picture of the Madonna and Child was visible behind a netting of iron wire. Into this wire some peasant hands had thrust a now fading bunch of pink roses. The picture was in shadow but he caught a radiance of gold, a glimmer of blue. He stopped before it for a moment, the words of a prayer rose to his lips. In the old days as he knew it had been the custom to put such pictures in lonely, unfrequented places, to remind passers-by to pray for the Madonna's protec-

tion on their journey through wild and perilous places, infested perhaps by bands of brigands. And although the shrine stood in a safe place and no physical dangers were to be encountered on a short morning walk to Fiesole, Markham felt as he said the prayer that he was in a very real sense praying for her protection. He found himself almost unconsciously repeating the *Salve Regina,* which had always formed part of his morning prayers. *"To Thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To Thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears."* . . . Surely the prayer of the very sorrowful? . . . *"Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us.* . . . "

He crossed himself and walked quickly up the hill toward the English convent at Fiesole. As he approached the entrance he saw some people coming down the flight of stone steps that led to the public door of the chapel. Some of them turned their heads as he passed to look at the tall young Englishman. He mounted the steps and as he entered the chapel a bell rang. He saw a priest accompanied by a young boy going up to the altar. The little building was full of people, and in the choir he saw many nuns kneeling. Markham knelt down in a bench near the door half hidden by the shadows, he remained in that posture all through the Mass that followed.

He wished Rina could have known where he was. Oh, he would go back to her very soon; he was miserable already at the separation. Already he was beginning to be ill at ease with Adrian, to feel nervous and irritated at his constant changes of mood. Last night he had spoken roughly to his wife over the affair of little Carla. And an unwise, indiscreet word from Beppino would reveal his own

share in the matter of Carla's disappearance. What a tangle it all was, and how angry they would both be if they discovered it was he who had advised her departure.

He found himself praying for Rina. Perhaps even now she was hearing Mass in Milan before her journey. Perhaps she was praying for him. He was sure that she still loved him. She had that kind of faithful disposition which does not easily change. He knew that when he returned he should find her waiting, eager and ready to welcome him. Not a word said. All the past forgotten. Only let them be together always. . . . At Stones—anywhere—so only they were together. Tears blinded his vision. Perhaps she was even now praying for his return—that it might not be too long delayed.

He had failed her so often. But he would never fail her again. In a few days he would start for England. Of course Adrian would try to prevent him, but what was Adrian to him in comparison with Rina? An enemy, masquerading as a friend. A destroyer of souls. He saw him then, immense, malignant, pitiless.

Now the priest had left the chapel. The little band of devout worshipers had melted away. There were no nuns now in the choir. He rose from his knees almost reluctantly and went toward the door, genuflecting as he passed before the tabernacle. On the steps outside shadowed by tall cypresses he came face to face with Beppino. It occurred to him that the man had seen him in the chapel and was waiting for him.

"Good morning, Beppino," said Markham with the frank smile that always endeared him to the Italians.

The man smiled in response.

"Good morning, signore. We have sent Carla away."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Markham. "Where is she?"

"She is not in Florence," said the man. "The nuns advised us and they said, too, it would not be right to let the *bambina* go with the English lady. But they knew of a convent where she could be received, and the nuns there are willing to take her, but they are poor, they require a small payment. If the signore——" He looked a little doubtfully at Markham.

"Oh, I'll make that all right," said Markham. "How much is it?" The man named a sum.

"The signore had better write to the nuns himself." He drew a grubby piece of paper from his pocket. "The address is written there. But the English signora must not know."

Markham glanced at the paper and then transferred it to his own pocket.

"Last night the Signore Guise came to see me. He was angry when he found Carla was not with us any more. He threatened——"

"Yes, yes," said Markham.

"He said he would come again to-day. My wife is afraid."

"She need not be afraid," said Markham. "I will tell the signore that I have seen you, and that you have sent Carla away from Florence and that she will be with other friends who wish to keep her. I will say you did not wish her to go away from Italy altogether. It will be quite true to say that, Beppino, and they will surely understand."

And in their hearts perhaps they would guess the reason.

"Carla was unhappy to go away," said the man. "She was fond of the Signora Guise. But it was

not the will of God." He looked at Markham.

"She will be safer and happier with the nuns," said Markham.

At the bottom of the steps he parted from Beppino. It was an immense relief to feel that Carla was out of reach and in a place where neither Adrian nor Adelaide could find her.

CHAPTER XXXII

By the time he reached the villa Adrian was having his morning coffee outside in the loggia as was his wont. He waved his hand to Markham as he came up the steps.

"Been for an early stroll? You must be hungry."

Markham sat down.

"I'll ring and tell them to bring your coffee here," said Adrian.

Evidently he was in a good humor this morning, fresh and vigorous. The coffee was brought, and Markham, who was really hungry, began to devour the rolls and butter that were provided for him.

"By the way, I met Beppino," he said.

"Did you speak to him?"

"Yes. I asked him what they'd done with Carla."

"And what did he say?"

"They've sent her away from Florence—she's gone to friends. She isn't coming back," said Markham in a toneless voice.

Adrian frowned. For a moment he was silent, then he burst forth angrily:

"Somebody's been making mischief. Why, they were awfully keen about it at first. I wonder who can have been getting at them?"

Markham said nothing; he concentrated his attention upon his food.

"One hates to feel that one's been stabbed in the dark!" said Adrian. "I don't mind how many enemies I have if they will only come out into the open and declare themselves. I should have suspected your lot, Mark, if you hadn't assured me they knew nothing about the matter at all."

"I certainly never told them—it would have been inviting them to interfere." He hated to think of the perfidious part he had played. He had not the courage to come out into the open and declare himself as Adrian had expressed it. He had been obliged to act secretly and he despised himself.

"It's a great blow to poor Addie," said Adrian reflectively; "still, I can't have her fretting about it. It isn't like her to be so upset over a trifle—to show a want of self-control as she did last night."

He went into the study. Markham could hear him pulling out drawers, arranging papers. But today he was not invited to assist him. Adelaide would be there with her typewriter, a good hard morning's work would be just the thing to steady her nerves, Adrian reflected. And it was no good accelerating Markham's evolution, a slow solid development might be relied upon now that the inception of the change was definitely begun. Markham found himself free to go out and paint, and no questions were asked as to what he intended to do. From time to time the echo of their voices reached him, for he was working at no great distance from the house, and then after an interval the steady click-click of the typewriter would indicate that work had been resumed. He was a little surprised at Adrian's want of sympathy for his wife's disappointment, and at that inclination to bully her into an outward resignation. It was one of the many little disillusion-

ments that persisted in assailing him during the days that immediately followed.

Adrian was very busy, and Adelaide looked fagged with the effort of keeping pace with him. "Back from Rome" was nearing its completion, and the piles of anti-clerical journals and publications, having served their purpose, had been thrust away into merciful oblivion.

But when Adelaide was not thus employed in helping her husband she was always ready to talk and walk with Markham. Evidently she had got over her disappointment about Carla and had accepted the situation, or it might be that Adrian had snubbed her into silence on the subject. She was a more sympathetic companion to Markham just then than her husband was; her disposition was more equable and she was less irritable. People ignorant of her iconoclastic views and meeting her for the first time were wont to describe her as "that very charming Mrs. Guise." And she realized that Markham must be suffering, although he had taken what was in her eyes the only right and wise course. So she encouraged him to talk about his suffering, his remorse, and she gently assuaged and flattered, and showed him the proper place for and the true proportions of such emotions in the life of a freed man. No man had ever become the child of liberty and progress without encountering agonizing conflicts that perhaps provided a most necessary discipline of pain. Men had shed their blood for liberty, she reminded him. This sympathy of Adelaide's was like the pouring of an anodyne upon Markham's wounds. Instead of dishonor she showed him something fine and honorable in his actions. Rina had never really cared for him or she could not have gone away with her mother, leaving him in Florence. Her departure was the result of wounded pride rather than of wounded

love. It was strange, but Adelaide's criticism of Rina seldom offended Markham as Adrian's did. It was so suave, so subtle, and it seemed to fit in also with much that he himself held to be true about her. And under the stimulus of Adelaide's words his very energy of imagination seemed to depict Rina as a proud and unforgiving woman, who had tried to usurp the foremost place in his life, had wished to coerce and conquer him, and who failing had gone her way.

If Rina had only written to him! He had hoped for letters with a keener longing than he was himself at first aware of. He would wait for news of her; he would not stir until a letter came; he would run no risk of missing it. But Adelaide seemed to check such a hope. She did not expect that Rina would write unless Mark wrote to her first. More than a week passed and he was still at Fiesole, miserable and restless, and no news came of the travelers. It became his habit to go down to Florence once every day and call at the Palazzo Ubinaldi for letters. Once or twice he received a letter from his mother; she was back at Stones; she hoped that he and Rina would soon be able to come home. But never an envelope, white, square, such as he pictured sometimes to himself, addressed in Rina's careful, sloping, un-English hand. He found himself unable to bear the silence any longer. Perhaps she was ill—had met with an accident. He conjectured every imaginable disaster. Finally he telegraphed to her: "Please send address. Am anxious for news. Writing. Markham." Surely that would show at least that he desired news of her. The answer was waiting for him two days later when he went to Florence. "Staying at Queen's Barn for the present. Rina." He did not tell Adelaide about this interchange of telegrams. She perceived

that he was unhappy and questioned him, but he was on his guard; he made evasive answer. He was ashamed that she should know of his weakness.

He tried quite unsuccessfully to picture Rina at Queen's Barn. But all clear visions of her eluded him; for him she was slipping away into infinite shadowed distances. And she was making things very hard for him, very difficult. Whatever happened in the future would surely not be only his fault. Rina was to blame, too, for her tacit but complete acceptance of the situation.

Then a letter from Helen inaugurated a new period of chagrin, and of unacknowledged suspense. Rina, she said, had replied to Markham's telegram, and had duly received his promised letter, but she was not very well; she had deputed the task of answering it to her mother. That was the excuse, but he could not bring himself to believe that Rina was too ill to write to him herself! And Helen did not write easily to her son-in-law. He was not a person whom she was finding it very easy to forgive just then. The irresponsibility, the faithlessness, the lack of backbone he had displayed gave her small hope for the future; she had less confidence than ever in his ultimate reformation. There seemed to her no solid basis in Markham's character upon which one could hope to build. He had nothing but those plausible, agreeable, surface attractions—a handsome face, a graceful figure, a winning voice and charming boyish ways—that had so quickly won Rina's heart. Helen was wretched when she thought of her daughter's sufferings, physical and mental. It was now no secret from her that in a few months Rina would be the mother of Markham's child. Rina had never told him of these hopes, and she had asked her mother not to mention the matter to him. She was too proud to wield a sentimental weapon in

appeal. He must not be won back in that way. If he came back it must be because he loved her too much to be able to remain apart from her any more. She did not want him back for any less reason than that.

The Marchesa almost wished that he would remain away until the event was over, though she thought that was hardly possible as it was not expected to take place until October. Helen felt that his presence might have an upsetting effect upon Rina, and she was already looking very fragile and delicate. Even her wonderful beauty had suffered some eclipse.

Helen's letter was perhaps more cold and guarded because of this imposed secrecy than it might otherwise have been. Markham must have no hint of future happenings. She gave him indeed very little news of Rina. The letter ended by saying: "We shall not be here very long and when we leave we may stay in town for a little. In August I shall take Rina to the sea. I will send you our change of address."

Did that mean they were not expecting him back before August? Were they beginning perhaps to assure themselves that he didn't mean to come at all? The tangle of it all! He longed to go home that very day.

And on the other hand the Guises were making strong if silent efforts to keep him with them. Soon he was very busy painting—the occupation was soothing, and he had been glad of it in those days of waiting. Markham was enough of an artist to have permitted his art to master him; there were days when, as it were, he felt himself compelled to paint. His work was clever, and it received that due admixture of criticism and flattery which stimulated him to fresh endeavor. Most of his work was done

out-of-doors, but in the evenings he had amused himself by making a couple of rough charcoal drawings of Adrian and his wife. He cleverly captured that rather leonine look which characterized Adrian—the great, finely-modeled head with its grizzled, square-growing mass of hair, the large flowing beard, the cruel eyes. Even in this sketch one felt the power of the man. It was better even than the old one Rina had seen at Stones, but it was less flattering. It was an absolutely unidealized Adrian.

He was finishing it one evening after Adelaide had gone up to bed and the two men were sitting alone in the study. Adrian was puffing away at a great pipe. Presently he looked up and said:

"Has Addie told you we shall go to New York in the autumn? I'm offered fat sums, Mark, for a course of lectures."

"Lectures?" said Markham looking up from his work. "What are you going to talk about?"

"Need you ask, my dear Mark? Am I not a specialist? I don't waste myself!"

"You'll find sympathizers?" said Mark, very delicately rubbing out a line he had just drawn.

"Everywhere. The Church of Rome is making great strides in the States—I forget how many millions of the household of faith she numbers among her children. A counter propaganda is necessary. Everything is done on such a colossal scale in America. My sales there assure me of sympathizers."

Markham laid down his bit of charcoal. He looked quickly from Adrian to the rough portrait of him, and was conscious that it lacked something which he did not dare to give it.

"You'd better come, too," said Guise carelessly; "no educated man in these days can dispense with a trip to the States."

"But I should be associated publicly with your views—your propaganda," said Markham quietly.

"That goes without saying. And aren't you a little tired of wabbling? Don't you want to come out into the open properly labeled?"

"I'm not sure about my label yet," said Markham.

Adrian's smile made him wince.

"My lectures are intended to give courage and decision to the timid—knowledge and light to those who sit in darkness."

"Ah, don't!" said Markham sharply. The scrap of quotation stabbed him. Was he not himself sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death?

"Dear me, you must have been writing home," said Adrian, astonished and a little angry.

"And what if I have?"

"Mrs. Proctor——"

"I forbid you to speak of her!" His face was white; his blue eyes were dark and fierce.

Even Adrian was surprised at the sudden petulant anger.

But Markham's nerves were on edge because of Rina's continued silence. It was the cruelest punishment she could have inflicted upon him. Day by day he fought a conflict with the demon pride that forbade him to return to England and to seek —on his knees if need be—that dear and beautiful presence.

"Such a trip as I propose would be the making of you. You would meet some of the clearest-headed rationalists of the day. You would know men who have traveled the same path you are stumbling on now, and who do not fear the threat of hell any more. You are a wabbler, you know, my dear Mark, and I think my lectures will settle many wabblers."

His airy conceit would have been laughable—if one had felt inclined to laugh. Markham at that moment was much nearer to hostile, indignant tears.

He wondered if he should end by hating Adrian, by fleeing from his presence.

"Anyhow, I shan't let you try," he said with a touch of insolence. "I'm seriously thinking of going home."

"You needn't tell me that. Your moods always give us the key. I can read you like a book!"

Markham rose.

"I can't work any more. This sketch is about done. It's not as good as the one of Adelaide. I'm going up to bed."

"Good night," said Adrian without looking up.

"Good night," said Markham sullenly.

Presently Adrian went up to his wife's room. She was sitting by the window in a white cotton robe. She seemed to be half asleep, but she roused herself at the sound of his step.

"Did you have any luck?" she said in her soft, trailing voice.

"Not much. So far he says he won't come—he's thinking of going home. He was rather rude, to tell you the truth, Addie. But then he was always a cub—he'd never any one to lick him into shape. But he'll think it over and he'll come round as he always does. It is sickeningly monotonous. We propose a course to him, he indignantly repudiates it almost with tears—I really believed he was going to cry to-night. Then for a few days he coquettes with the idea—then he gets an upsetting letter from his mother-in-law—he is piqued into taking our advice. But you know when we've once got him safe he won't wabble any more—they don't. The percentage of people won back to the Church after

definite deliberate apostasy is, I believe, quite negligible."

Her face hardened.

"We've done all our work twice over," she said, "we were most awfully retarded by his return to the Faith last year at the time of his marriage. He isn't really free of the effects yet. If she'd been able to hold him——" She paused.

"Only she wasn't." Adrian's smile was brilliant, he took Adelaide's hand in his. "They are pretty far apart now."

Adelaide looked reflective.

"Why do people cling so to Catholicism, Adrian? I was never a Catholic, but you were. You ought to know."

"I suppose because it plays on the two commonest emotions of humanity—superstition and fear."

"But even that doesn't account for the love—the love that is quite beyond fear—which so many devout Catholics have."

"There is always an immense amount of auto-suggestion mixed up in all very exaggerated devotion. And then there's the fear of offending the fetish which is observable in the savagest tribes," said Adrian. "Oh, I've gone into that part of it very thoroughly in 'Back from Rome.' There are excerpts from the writings of many very celebrated apostates. I shall enlarge upon that aspect in my lectures."

But Adelaide still seemed dissatisfied.

"You mustn't minimize the strength and effect of that love which so many of them have for their Church," she said. "I've noticed that it's ever so much stronger than mere fear in many devout people. In Markham, for instance, there seems to be something that actually holds him. Something we can't quite touch. Something that is hereditary, that

seems to have come down to him from suffering ancestors. But it is more than a family tradition. Sometimes I have thought even that it clings to him much more than he clings to it. If you could attack that root, Adrian, you would succeed. But it's so strong behind his surface indifference."

She paused. Her grave way of speaking, the beauty of her modulated tones, always compelled Adrian's admiring attention.

"I daresay you are right," he said, "and you know they themselves do not attempt to limit the power and efficacy of the sacraments as channels of grace. A man who has once known them can never be the same as a man who has never known them. And thus they will tell you that the man who has deliberately renounced his faith is more definitely lost than the ignorant sinner who has never known it at all."

"There," said Adelaide, "is the voice of the seminary."

But his words had made her feel uncomfortable. A kind of cold fear crept into her heart. What if they were right, after all, these—fools?

"In the meantime," said Adrian, taking no notice of her sarcasm, "we can do nothing with Mark till he's recovered from his tantrums."

"He is only cross because his dear Rina hasn't written to him. How clever she is to ignore his existence like this!"

"But he's had letters from England. I've seen them lying on his table," said Guise.

"Only from the Marchesa San Raimondo. And he feels his wife's silence, I know, from things he's let fall. We must be patient. He's been through a lot, and he's got a lot more to go through before he wins his freedom as you have won yours. It does mean suffering, especially to that sensitive artistic

temperament. He reminds me sometimes of young Aloysius Marvell—you remember how he fought. But look at him now!"

A very curious look of satisfaction came over Adrian's face at the mention of this name. It was at once malevolent and cunning and transformed his face into something altogether diabolical.

"Aloysius Marvell," he repeated, as if the name recalled the most precious memories. "But he hadn't a wife like that. He was alone. We must remember we have to deal not only with Mark but with young Mrs. Proctor."

"Yes, but think what it will mean for us—the owner of an old Catholic property, a young, clever man of an old Catholic family. It is worth almost anything to us, and I wish we could have taken him to the States."

Thus solaced with her encouragement, Adrian betook himself to bed. But what a temper Mark had—one couldn't say anything to him now.

"I get pretty sick of him sometimes," he acknowledged to himself. "And as for that drawing he's made of me, it's nothing but a piece of impertinence. I wonder if he is aware of the fact?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

IT was during the first hot days of July, when Florence lay in the grip of a scorching sirocco, that Markham came out of the Palazzo Ubinaldi one morning after his usual unsuccessful quest for letters. He walked along the Lung' Arno and turned into the shade of the Via Tornabuoni. He had not gone many steps when he came face to face with Toni Delfini.

They had not met for a long time—not indeed

since the departure of Rina for England. If it had been possible to escape him Markham would certainly have done so. He both looked and felt extremely uncomfortable. Maria Binaldi had not been near the Guises for a long time; she had dropped them quietly when the first novelty had worn off, and Markham thought she had done this possibly for Rina's sake. And there was no doubt, of course, that if Delfini had heard of the rupture between him and Rina he would certainly take his wife's part in the matter.

"I heard you had not yet returned to England," said Delfini.

He stopped in front of Markham with a decisive action that showed he did not intend to be passed by with only a careless greeting.

"As you see, I have not gone," said Markham.

"Will you come back and have luncheon with me?" said Delfini unexpectedly. "I shall be glad of your company. My sister has run away from the heat."

"I am afraid I can't have the pleasure," said Markham, looking at his watch. "I have an engagement."

He felt that the last thing he desired to have in the present ravaged state of his nerves was a heart-to-heart talk with Toni.

"Please don't refuse," said Toni very quietly indeed, "I have something to tell you—something you ought to hear."

Markham knew instinctively that Toni had had news of Rina. The thought stabbed his heart with a fierce jealous pain. Had she written to him? When he considered that Delfini might have received one of those letters for which he himself had ached and longed in vain, he felt almost sick with suspense.

"What news can you have that could possibly interest me?" he said angrily.

Delfini was unmoved by his anger.

"Will you come back with me? I am not going to talk here."

Markham walked silently by the side of Toni. After all, if he really had news of Rina he had better go and hear it. Any news was better than none. Even Helen had ceased to write.

At the door of the Palazzo Delfini Toni paused.

"I think I had better tell you I have a friend staying with me; he arrived from England two days ago. He also wishes to see you."

Markham was too proud to ask the name of this friend. He wondered very much who it could be, and why he should wish to see him. Was it this person who had brought the mysterious news of Rina? If so, why had they taken no steps to find him? He forgot for the moment the careful manner in which he had so assiduously hidden his address.

Then another thought occurred to him—a terrible thought which forced the speech from his dry lips.

"Is it about my wife? Do you mean that she's ill?"

For an answer Toni led the way into the smoking-room. There, standing near the window looking out upon the busy street below, was a slight, rather stooping figure, white-haired, and dressed in a black cassock. Something in his pose was strangely familiar to Markham. A great fear seized him. Why had Father Laurence come to Italy? What was he doing here in the Delfini palace of all places in the world?

"Father!" he said. He went up to him, holding out a hand that shook.

He heard the door shut and, turning, saw that Toni had quietly left the room.

"Well, Markham, I'm very glad you've been found."

"Why are you here?" demanded Markham. "What have you come to tell me?" His face was white, but his voice was astonishingly steady. "Is it a plot?" he flung at him with increasing indignation.

"Sit down, Markham. No, it is not a plot, but I came to Florence on purpose to see you and I'd not been able to find you. We asked at the Palazzo Ubinaldi, and they said you were in the habit of going there for your letters. You must forgive us for having watched for your coming—we had no other means of finding you. And your mother suggested I should make this journey. You see she was getting anxious about you."

Again that sick suspense seized him.

"Is—it about Rina?" he said. "Is she ill?" A darker thought crossed his troubled mind. "She's not——?" He covered his face with his hands.

"No—no," said Father Laurence, "thank God I didn't have to come and tell you that. But I thought it was time you had full knowledge of all the facts. Perhaps it hasn't been quite fair to keep you in the dark, however much you may have deserved it. You've had no excuse, you know, for remaining two months away from your wife."

"My wife went away of her own will, and left me," said Markham.

"She traveled home with her mother, but it was understood that you were to follow her almost at once. You had no real excuse for not going with her. No, Markham, I don't want to scold you. I daresay you have been having a pretty bad time of it, too; you look as if you had. And it's not too

late to make amends, it's not too late to come back to her."

He looked up.

"It's not possible, Father. Rina doesn't want me."

"And since when hasn't she wanted you?"

"She never writes. We are as utterly separated as two people can be."

"Markham, I am going to ask you a very straight question. Do you still love your wife?"

"Love her!" said Markham. "Why, what do you suppose? Have you forgotten what I told you before I was married? If I have changed it is only that I have learned to love her a thousand times more."

"Then don't let your pride come between you any more. Don't let anything or any one come between you. You've treated her shamefully, staying away all this time from her. But the prodigal went home in the end, you know."

"She doesn't want me," he repeated in a dull hopeless tone.

"It will be time to leave her forever when she tells you so. And remember the child——"

"The child?" Markham caught at the word. "What do you mean? What on earth do you mean?"

As soon as he uttered the words Father Laurence saw that Markham had been kept for some reason or other in astonishing ignorance of the fact. And it had given him a shock; one had only to look at his white, haggard face, his terrible blazing eyes. But the very fact of his having been thus kept in ignorance pointed to a most tragic condition of estrangement between these two young people, who scarcely more than a year ago had learned to love each other so dearly. There must have been grave

misunderstanding, if nothing worse, to effect such a separation at such a time.

Father Laurence knew little of the rights of the case. He had not seen Rina herself, but he heard how terribly ill and miserable she was looking from Mrs. Proctor, who had seen her in London and who had after much difficulty extracted from Helen the intelligence that Markham was still in Florence, in all probability staying with the Guises. And it was Mrs. Proctor who, unknown to Helen, had written to Toni to ask him to help Father Laurence in the search.

The priest looked at him pityingly. Just now, with that blank white look of misery on his face, he seemed little more than a boy.

"I thought naturally you had heard," he said very gently. "Yes, your wife is to have a child in the autumn. That is why I want you to go back to her."

Markham again hid his face in his hands; he felt that he could not even meet that kindly glance. Rina to be a mother. Rina to face the peril which once he remembered almost hoping might never be her destiny, so terrified had he been of losing her in those past days of love. And he had not known. She had never told him. She had left it to others to tell him. She had never written a word.

"And now, Markham, I know without your telling me that you are staying with this man Guise. I don't quite know what they are trying to do, but if their aim has been to separate you from your wife it seems to me that they have succeeded pretty thoroughly. Now listen to me. Take my advice and do not go back there, no, not even to fetch your things. I am ready to start for England with you to-night."

"It's not possible. I don't dare. Whatever you say I know she doesn't want me."

"Remember," said the priest, "the child is yours and hers. And your child, Markham, ought to be born in your own home where you were born and your father before you. Don't lose any time. Start this very day. Your wife is ill—she is passing through a very critical time. I heard this not from her but from your mother."

"It wouldn't be possible for me to go off like that," said Markham. "I couldn't treat the Guises with such rudeness. They have been very kind to me. I owe it to them to go at least and say good-by."

"My dear Markham, if you will forgive my saying so, I think you have had quite as much of their kindness as is good for you. It's time you thought a little of your wife and of what is in front of her and for that reason I am urging you to start tonight."

"It's impossible. I mean—I must go and say good-by to them and fetch my things. I can't go to England in just what I stand up in."

"You can buy any little thing you may need for your journey in Florence," said Father Laurence inexorably.

"I'll run up to Fiesole directly after lunch and explain. It will only take a couple of hours."

"No," said Father Laurence, "you are not going to Fiesole."

"I'm free. I'm not in prison. Of course I shall go. Do you think they could keep me now?"

Father Laurence looked at him with stern, grave eyes.

"I am not going to let you give them the chance."

"Rina can't want me. She must hate me now."

"Then you must try to win her love over again. It was once all yours—you know that quite well, Markham."

Yes, once that gift had been his, as he knew, in full unstinting measure. All his to keep and cherish or to destroy.

"I can't go back! I can't! I can't! If you knew all——"

"I know that you fell again into those bad hands from which she made so plucky an effort to save you. But that's past, isn't it, Markham? You have no time to lose. There is only one thing, humanly speaking, that ought to occupy your mind just now and that is your wife. Come back home with me. You can send a telegram to your mother to prepare them for your coming. But don't stay here another hour longer than you need."

Markham rose and went to the window. The baking glare from the pavements below hurt his eyes. Yes, he would go home. He would go back to Rina—entreat her forgiveness. She might refuse to receive him, but somehow he didn't think she would do that. She had been so ready always to forgive, to overlook. Had there been a train then he knew that he would have started at once.

The door opened and Delfini came into the room.

"Shall we go in to lunch?" he said.

He glanced from one to the other. Father Laurence said quietly:

"We shall be leaving for England to-night."

They went in to luncheon.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MARKHAM spent the afternoon alone. It was very hot, and judging from the silence of the palace the hour dedicated to the siesta was being meticulously observed. Markham lay for a time on

the big divan in the smoking-room, but he was quite unable to sleep. It was too dark to read, for the shutters and persiennes were alike closed to keep out the fiery breath of the sirocco.

An agonizing terror of suspense had driven every other emotion from his heart; it seemed to possess him body and soul. What if Rina should die before he reached her side? What if God intended to punish him at last?

It was as if the scales had been torn rudely from his eyes, and he saw himself almost as a stranger. He could scarcely understand his long and close submission to influences that threatened to destroy him, but it seemed to him that they had in some way contrived to paralyze his love, hypnotizing him so that he had become as the legendary eater of lotus-bloom, careless and forgetful of all that had gone before. Now suddenly a few words from Father Laurence, stern, kind words, had recalled the old Markham. Had he come back too late? He was the prodigal who had fed on the husks when all the time a royal kingdom of love was waiting for his return.

In that hour he hated Adrian as he had never thought he could hate any one. He saw in him the arch-enemy, the destroyer of souls. It was to his everlasting shame that he had broken his promise and returned to his old friendship with these people. He had been miserable, he told himself, in that daily endurance of Adrian's moods. His sudden anger, his daily discourtesy, his unconcealed scorn—why had he borne all these so long with never a protest? Worse even than Adrian's rudeness and contempt were Adelaide's criticisms of Rina, to which he had listened so tamely. They had prated of freedom and liberty while all the time they had been bent upon enslaving him body and soul. But now—Father Laurence was right—he would never set his foot

across their threshold again. A sob of relief broke from him. This time the renunciation would be unaccompanied by any pain. Rather it would mean a great joy that would change his whole life and take him back to Rina.

After tea he said to Father Laurence:

"I am going out to get my ticket and buy one or two little things for the journey. I'll be as quick as possible."

"Shall I come?" said the priest, a little hesitatingly.

"No, you needn't come." Markham suddenly observed his expression. "Oh, you can trust me now!" he said lightly.

First he bought his ticket, which seemed to him now a magic passport that was to take him as fast as train and boat could travel back to Rina. Then he walked along the Lung' Arno till he came to a church which sometimes he had visited with her. He paused for a moment and then entered it. There were some people kneeling near a confessional, as once he had thought he should never kneel again. But he took his place among them and awaited his turn.

All the streets were flooded with gold, at least so it seemed to him, when he left the church. The Arno, smooth and colored in softest tones of blue and jade, rippled gently beneath the arches of the old bridges. He looked westward and saw the distant mountains lying pale and remote against a sky of almost unbearable brilliance. Nearer he saw the deep woods of the Cascine; the lines of honey-colored houses, the low hills, the domes, the towers of Oltr' Arno. He felt as if he were looking upon it all for the last time, and he remembered that often and often he and Rina had stood there together and

gazed contentedly upon all that calm and gracious loveliness.

He turned, and he had hardly done so when he saw the immense figure of a man coming swiftly toward him. The light was full on Adrian's face, showing up all its creases and bitter little lines. Markham seemed to see him with a clearness of vision that had never been his before. Instinctively he shrank from him, not from fear but from a sense of interior repulsion toward something he judged now to be wholly and incontestably evil.

This man had tried to rob him both of his faith and of his happiness. He was a satanic figure seeking to destroy not the body but the immortal soul. He had the desperate power of the lost. He was grouped with evil forces, had flung all his intelligence and strength upon the side of the powers of darkness that would forever extinguish for others the light they had themselves lost. Adrian saw him and stopped.

"Why—why—Mark, what are you doing here?" he said in a tone of surprise that was not wholly without an admixture of suspicion.

Something had surely happened, else why should Markham stand there and look at him without saying a word, pale and nervous and profoundly agitated? Why did he stand there speechless with an expression of horror in his eyes? What had happened to him since he left Fiesole that morning?

"What is the matter, Mark? Have you had bad news?" he demanded in a loud fierce tone.

He towered above Markham, an immense, powerful, dominating figure.

"Yes. I am going home to-night," said Markham.

A red light came into Adrian's eyes. For a moment Markham had the dreadful fear that he was

going to strike him—here in the street with curious eyes watching them. As it was, the loud and booming tones of Adrian's voice had caused several people to turn and stand still to watch what seemed to be a promising dispute.

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" he said in a threatening tone. "You won't be such a fool. You'll at least have the civility to come up and say good-by to my wife after enjoying her hospitality all these weeks."

Markham felt that there was something degrading in the little scene so publicly enacted. He would have given worlds to escape. But to escape with this huge man standing in front of him was a physical impossibility. His hatred of Adrian flamed into something that was fierce and violent; it shone in his eyes as he regarded him with a steady unflinching gaze.

"I will write to Mrs. Guise. I haven't time to come," he said. He looked up and down the street. People were strolling about lazily; here and there could be seen a family group, contented and happy, then a young man and a girl passed, arm-in-arm. All were apparently enjoying the cooler aid from the river after the great heat of the day. Markham was aware that several of these groups were staring at him and Adrian, probably taking them for indignant father and recalcitrant son.

"We shall wash our hands of you in the future if you go away like this now. It won't be any use your coming whining back the next time you quarrel with your wife!" said Adrian, raising his voice so that it must have been easily audible across the street.

"You may rely upon me never to come back," said Markham, flinging back his head. He tried to move on but again Adrian stood in his way.

"Listen to me," he said, "I've taken a great deal of trouble with you from first to last and so has my wife. Too much, perhaps, considering what a rotter you have always been. I'm willing now to let you come back—to take you with me to the States. You can get some sort of separation or divorce from your wife, and you can free yourself from all the fetters that hold you now. Be a free man! Turn your back once for all on the nursery bogies, the priests, and the fetishes. If your wife has sent for you it is only a plot to get you back, whatever excuse she may have made. Come into the outer air of freedom and liberty, Mark!"

Markham interrupted him with a touch of violence.

"I am going back to my wife to-night. Nothing you can say can change me now. You have kept us apart all these months. I have been a blind, blind fool!" His white face was almost distorted with passion as he flung the words at Adrian. "Don't touch me, Adrian! Leave me!"

But Adrian did not move. He laid a detaining hand on the younger man's shoulder. To lose Markham meant a very heavy defeat; he was not going to let him go without a struggle.

"I insist upon your returning with me to Fiesole to fetch your things!"

Markham looked wildly up and down the street. He saw that now quite a little crowd had gathered, watching the quarrel between the two *forestieri.*

"I am not coming with you and I shall never set foot in your house again. I have done with you forever. Listen—I have been to confession—I have been reconciled to the Church. And now I'm going back to Rina. I shall never see you again. But some day I hope I shall be able to forgive you—to pray for you!"

Adrian gave a loud laugh that was almost like the laugh of a madman. A torrent of blasphemy fell from his lips. Markham heard it with slowly-growing horror; he shrank back as if the words had actual power to soil him physically. He had never known Adrian until now, when the primitive man was revealed, and he realized for the first time the greatness and immensity of the peril from which he had been rescued. He made a sudden movement, too swift to be intercepted by a man in such a fury, and he darted past Adrian with a swift elusiveness that defied capture. He heard a cheer go up from the watching crowd as he made his escape. He gained a side street and ran and ran until he came to the doors of the Delfini palace.

CHAPTER XXXV

MARKHAM ran lightly up the stairs with a sense of joy in his recovered liberty that even the horrible little scene from which he had just emerged could not altogether destroy. It was over now, he told himself, and he hoped never to see Adrian's face again. But those last dreadful words were ringing in his ears like the epilogue of that appalling nightmare.

In the smoking-room he found Delfini alone, and was told that Father Laurence had been persuaded to rest until dinner-time.

"He's an oldish man to take two such long journeys in one week," explained Toni.

"I'll see that he rests when he gets back to Stones," said Markham. Then he went up to Delfini and said frankly:

"I am sorry, but I am afraid I gave you a lot of trouble to find me. You see, I didn't want to be

found. But you were quite right, and I've got my ticket and I'm going home with Father Laurence to-night."

Conte Delfini had had many hard and bitter thoughts of Markham. He was the man, unworthy of Rina's love, who had married her and then made her miserable. She had always tried to find excuses for him, and Toni was perfectly aware that her love had survived all those sharp trials to which it had been subjected. But there was something about Markham's frank, almost boyish speech that touched him.

"I hope you will allow me to say that I am very glad," he said in his quiet, precise tones. "You have already more than repaid me for any trouble I may have taken."

Markham's face grew suddenly grave.

"Will you pray, please, that I may not be too late?" he said. The tears blinded his eyes. He felt suddenly exhausted, as if the emotions of the last few hours had been too great a strain upon him. His self-control was beginning to give way under the stress of bodily and mental fatigue.

"I shall always pray for you and Donna Rina," sain Toni gravely.

Before he left Florence that night Markham told him the history of little Carla, and put the matter into his hands. Toni knew the convent whither the child had gone very well and he promised to write to the nuns about her, and told Markham that he could always send the money for her maintenance through him. The affair was thus happily settled and Markham felt certain that the Guises would never be permitted to discover the child's safe retreat. Whether they ever found out his own part in the affair had become a matter of total indifference to him.

They left by the night train. Through those apparently endless hours of suffering wakefulness Markham endured an anguish of suspense that he felt no future happiness could ever quite obliterate. Yes, he had sinned, sinned very heavily. God might well punish him for his perfidy, his dishonor, his faithlessness. And what punishment could be more filled with everlasting bitterness than for him to return home and find no Rina awaiting him?

From Paris he telegraphed to Helen to say that he would arrive in London that same afternoon. Knowing his mother's capricious and roaming habits he began to fear that she might be away from Stones and so fail to receive his telegram. He did not want to risk any delay in seeing Rina. But he was uncertain of her whereabouts and had nothing but a letter from Helen already more than a month old to go by. In it she had mentioned that they were expecting to go to London in July, and it was to the house in Prince's Gate that he intended first to inquire for them. He did not think the Ellingtons would be there, for Helen had said something about their leaving town earlier than usual, as her sister was feeling the heat very much. Probably she and Rina were already at the seaside, and he wondered if they would have already telegraphed to him.

Markham traveled straight up to town with Father Laurence, but the priest was unable to accompany him any farther, and left him, going at once to Paddington on his way to Stones. The heat and dust and airlessness of the great city oppressed Markham; the parched trees and dusty roads seemed alike to be crying out for rain. The grass in the parks was all burned up and brown; the leaves of the trees were full and darkened. Tired people wandered aimlessly, or pushed ahead in feverish haste

to be finished with their errand, and listless, querulous children played in the open spaces.

Markham had taken a taxi, and in a very short time he found himself nearing Prince's Gate. When he came in sight of the house he looked up anxiously at the windows as if they might give him some indication of what was passing within the walls. The front of the house presented an uninhabited look and the windows were all closely shuttered; they offered no sort of welcome to Markham. Yet the very sight of it brought back poignant memories of Rina, of his brief and ardent courtship. His heart beat as it had done on that June morning of last year when his hopes had been brave and high. Now he was coming back after weeks, nay, months, of separation, of misunderstanding.

He rang the bell. There was no answer. After a pause he rang again. Surely the house was never left without a caretaker? There must be some one within. At last he heard the sound of unhurrying footsteps; the heavy bolts were drawn back and an elderly woman confronted him.

"Is Mrs. Proctor here?" said Markham, feeling almost faint with suspense.

She shook her head.

"No, sir. But there's a telegram come for her mother—the Marchesa. Came a couple of hours ago and I haven't liked to send it on."

"Perhaps it was the one I sent from Paris," said Markham.

So they did not know yet of his coming, unless his mother had been a more reliable messenger than he dared to hope.

"We were ready for them last week, but they didn't come," said the woman, "and her ladyship said Mrs. Proctor wasn't well and had been sent

to the sea. But she didn't say where. One of the maids, too, said she was ill."

"Ill?" His face was blanched with terror. A curious faintness came over him; he heard strange loud buzzing sounds in his ears. It was hardly to be wondered at, for since an early cup of coffee and a roll in Paris he had eaten nothing all day.

The woman looked at him with sudden compassion.

"May I ask your name, sir?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm Mr. Proctor—I've just come from Italy, and I expected to find my wife here."

"Won't you step inside, sir? I'll go and find her ladyship's letter, maybe she gave some address. And I'll bring you a cup of tea."

Markham followed her into the hall. He felt suddenly tired and exhausted and as if he lacked strength to go any farther.

"Thanks very much. A cup of tea would be simply splendid," he said, forcing one of his brilliant smiles, which went straight to the woman's heart. She showed Markham into a room at the back of the dining-room and hurried away to the kitchen regions to prepare some food for him.

Mrs. Rowe, who was now in charge of the town house, had been for many years the cook at Lady Ellington's. Afterward she had been promoted to the office of housekeeper, and then health and eyesight failing she had been given this lighter post of caretaker. And no one knew better than she the true inwardness of family happenings. Of course she had heard gossip—the gossip of the servants' hall that consisted very largely of speculation founded upon the one incontrovertible fact that the young couple who had been so hastily engaged and married had now for some reason or other seen fit to separate. Her ladyship's "foreign niece" had returned

home with her mother and without her husband—and she in delicate health, too! Mrs. Proctor being nice-spoken and withal generous was dubbed a "sweet young lady" in the circles that sat below the salt, so that it was obvious her husband was to blame. He must have turned out a brute! "And it's always worse when both sides is Catholics," murmured Mrs. Rowe to herself. "People expects more of them in general, and then they can't go in for none of that there divorcin'."

And now here was Mr. Proctor, delivered, so to speak, into her hands, and she felt a little thrill of excitement at the thought of entertaining him. He was also "nice-spoken" and had a way with him. It was obviously her duty to feed him, whatever he had done. Men always required to be fed, particularly when they were "upset-like." And Mr. Proctor had looked decidedly queer and upset-like. What was still more strange was that he had evidently expected to find his wife there. So whatever he had done he must now be sorry, and perhaps he had come home to say so. A lover's quarrel, perhaps? Still, it was odd.

She bustled upstairs with the tray, and Markham revived at the sight of some tea, bread and butter, a boiled egg and a little brandy. She even produced a box of cigarettes. She made him lie on the sofa and brought a pillow for his head. If she had had a fatted calf it would certainly have been served for his benefit.

All these attentions met with grateful if weary looks and muttered thanks. Now did he want to send a telegram? She could easily run out—it wasn't far. She was the trustworthy experienced servant of long standing, and she inspired confidence. No, he wouldn't send one just yet, thank you, he said, but hadn't she said something about a letter.

with an address? That was what he would like best to see.

It was very kind of her to fuss over him in this way, but he was so very tired, he wanted dreadfully to go to sleep, and then when he had slept and felt more like himself he must get up and go out and search for Rina.

She was ill. Even if they heard through his mother of his return it was unlikely that she would come to town. It was very doubtful that he would be able to trace her whereabouts to-day, and there must be a delay of perhaps twenty-four hours more before he could see her, hold her in his arms, hear her tender and loving words of forgiveness. His heart ached at the thought—he wanted her now, now. . . .

While Mrs. Rowe bustled off as fast as increasing age and stoutness would permit, he fell asleep on the sofa. He never heard a ring at the bell which summoned Mrs. Rowe down from her bedroom to pull back the bolts and open the door once more. Outside there was a taxi with luggage, and on the doorstep stood two figures. They were the Marchesa San Raimondo and young Mrs. Proctor—her ladyship's foreign niece, as she was invariably called by the household at Queen's Barn.

"Oh, Mrs. Rowe, didn't you expect us? I wrote yesterday," said the Marchesa.

"No, my lady, not a word," said Mrs. Rowe.

Here was a task which called for diplomacy, seeing that Mrs. Proctor was in delicate health and must on no account be permitted to receive a sudden shock.

The luggage was brought into the hall, and then Mrs. Rowe drew the Marchesa aside and whispered something in her ear. Then she went quietly

down the hall and closed a door that was standing ajar.

"What did she say, mother? Has anything happened?" Rina's voice sounded tired.

Helen looked at her for a moment.

"Rina, dear," she said, "come into the dining-room. I can tell you better there."

She led her into the big front dining-room with its darkened shuttered windows.

"Do tell me," said Rina.

That hope—never long absent from her heart—came back with a litle throb of pain. But it couldn't be that, or surely her mother would have told her at once. It must be something bad. Bad news of Markham perhaps. He had not written now for a long time.

"Markham is in there," said Helen quietly; "he is asleep, Mrs. Rowe says. He arrived about an hour ago—he told her he had come from Italy. And Rina—he seemed to expect to find you here."

"Markham here?" said Rina. She could not realize it; it seemed incredible. She had so often dreamed her mother had come to her telling her that Markham had returned. And always she had awakened to the empty solitude that she imagined was to be her portion forever. And yet in her heart had she not always felt that some day, before her great trial, Markham would really return to her, in answer to all her prayers? But of late hope had been indeed a "timid friend," a light that flickered and grew dim. Now he was here. Why, she had yet to learn.

Mrs. Rowe came back into the room.

"Did he ask for me? You said he expected to find me here?" said Rina.

"Yes, ma'am. Indeed he asked for you, and he seemed upset-like when I said as how you should

have come last week only that you were not well. I was just going up to fetch her ladyship's letter for him to read when you rang the bell."

Rina had risen and moved toward the door.

"Is he there? In the study?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Shall I come with you?" said Helen.

Rina was so white and looked so agitated that she feared she was going to faint.

"No. I think I'll go alone."

When she entered the study she saw Markham lying on the sofa sleeping the sleep of exhaustion. Rina stood for a little while looking at him—at the face which was so dear to her. She could see the changes in it. He was thinner, and there were little lines of worry on his brow. His thick, crisp, chestnut hair was ruffled, and hung loosely above his forehead.

She did not like to disturb him. He had come from Italy, so he had told Mrs. Rowe, and perhaps he was fatigued and upset by the long journey. But he had wanted her—had asked for her. Some message must have gone astray.

She went timidly forward and laid her hand on his. Markham awoke immediately; he looked up. He had been dreaming of Rina, and she was actually there, standing in front of him. And surely she had touched him—surely that was the pressure of her hand that he could still feel upon his? He sprang to his feet.

"Oh, Rina, my darling," he said, and put out his arms.

Rina crept into them.

There was very little to be said. He held her to his heart, and she knew that it was her own Markham who had returned to her, as surely she had always known that he would. She heard

broken phrases of love and contrition, incoherent entreaties for forgiveness. She felt his lips upon hers.

Little by little she was to hear of his chance meeting with Delfini, and of how he had gone back to his house with him and found Father Laurence there. How he had learned then for the first time. And was it possible that she could forgive him? She listened contentedly, too, while he told her of that last encounter with Adrian Guise on the Lung' Arno, of the bitter words that had passed between them, of the wild fury of Adrian when he realized that Markham had passed forever beyond the reach of his influence, and was leaving for England that very night. It had been a hideous, degrading little scene which might easily have ended in blows had not Markham made good his escape. That was all. But he had come back to her emancipated, a free man. He only wanted her forgiveness, and to know that she would receive him.

"I did telegraph to my mother, but I suppose she was away from Stones as usual and didn't get it in time to let you know," he said presently, when Rina had assured him that she had forgiven him long ago. "We must go back to Stones as soon as you feel able to make the journey. I'm longing to be there with you."

"To-morrow," Rina whispered.

There were tears of happiness in her eyes. Not only had he come back, but she knew that he would never leave her again.

"Mother is there—she is waiting—" she said.

In her great joy she had forgotten Helen. She went to the door, and Markham slipped his hand in her arm, and they went out into the hall together. They saw Helen standing there, and came quickly toward her.

"Mother!" said Rina, "Markham has come back."

CHAPTER XXXVI

FROM the Marchesa San Raimondo, Stones, Gloucestershire, to Conte Antonio Delfini, Palazzo Delfini. Florence. Italy.

"October 29, 19—.

"DEAR CONTE DELFINI:

"I am writing at last to give you news of Rina, as you so kindly expressed a wish to hear. She is wonderfully well, and the baby is a darling. He is very like her, we all think, with his big brown eyes and fair hair. He is just three weeks old, and is making all the progress the most anxious mother—and grandmother—could possibly expect. I shall be staying here for the present. It is such an immense place that I don't feel at all in their way, and they both seem to wish me to remain, 'to help look after the baby,' Rina says; but I know it is because they are both afraid I should find it lonely at Settignano by myself. It is so long since I have been in England that I am quite enjoying it—rain and fogs and all! And if I settle at Settignano in the spring, I shall have plenty of the lovely Tuscan sunshine later on.

"Markham is very busy; he finds plenty of work in looking after his property here, and indeed he sometimes complains that it takes up too much of his time. He is delighted with his small son. He and Rina ask me to say that they hope you and Maria will come and pay them a visit here next summer. They are so anxious to see you again, and Rina wants to show you her new home. It is

wonderful how readily she has adapted herself to life in England. But she is very happy, and that is the secret of her complete contentment with it. We all feel that she and Markham owe much of their recovered happiness to your kindly intervention and help. But I mustn't write of the past, for it is dead and buried, and we only remember it when we want to renew our great thankfulness for dear Markham's escape and safety. When I look at him now, I wonder that I could ever have felt so hopeless about him, and even come so near to a sense of despair. He wants to make Stones just what it used to be in his father's lifetime, and I am sure he will succeed.

"With kind remembrances from us all,

"Yours very sincerely,

"HELEN SAN RAIMONDO."

THE END.

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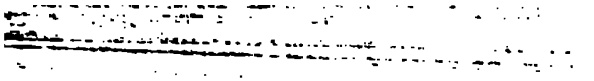

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